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Leni Parker
Gene Roddenberry Jr.

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Danger Lennier

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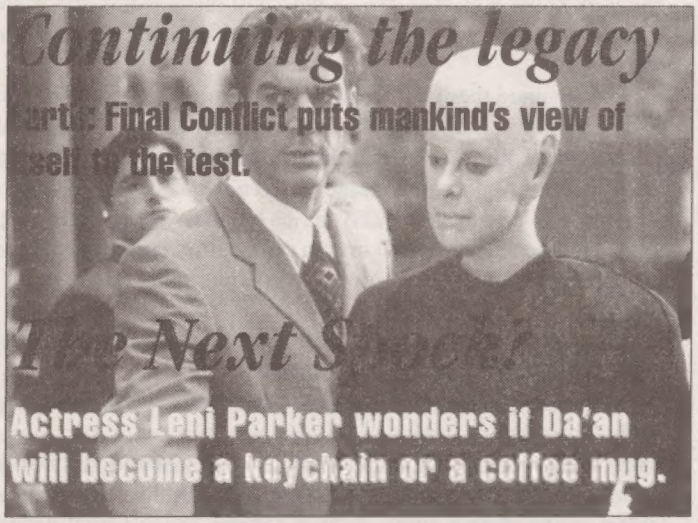

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Giving my head a shake

It's that time of the year again.

It's the time when news of who's on and who's off the final ballot for the Prix Aurora Award begins leaking out. It is the first wave of excitement that will break this fall when the winners are announced in Montreal. As of this writing, I've heard from three contributors/friends who have been told that they're finalists. Of course, being the curious sort, I went to the Aurora website after each message to see who else made the cut. And found each time that the information was unavailable — but it was expected within the next few days.

So let me preface the rest of this column by saying that I have no idea whether Parsec made the cut (we and a number of our contributors were on the scaled down nomination list in early June. I make this point, only because there will be those — and they know who they are — who will dismiss this argument as sour grapes. I want to make it clear that, at this point in the game, there are no grapes — sour or otherwise.

As I scanned the list of short-listed nominees, I noticed something that I consider to be an abomination. Among the nominees for Best Work Other are the television series Outer Limits and Earth: Final Conflict. When Reboot appeared on the final ballot in 1996, I thought it represented a weakness in the awards.

After all, how can a weekly series be justly compared to a poem (which, by the way, had been short-listed) or to a publication such as On Spec (ditto) or to Parsec (double ditto)? It can't. To do so would be, as the cliche goes, comparing apples to oranges.

The category is a catch-all. If it's not a novel, short story or artwork, then it automatically dumped into the last category.

With only five or six finalists in the category, someone is going to be unfairly excluded and their work and efforts unrecognized. Literary works are threatened with being steamrolled by the visibility and visual quality of the television programs. On the other hand, these programs could be the victims of literary elitism as voters opt to place a publication or a poem above a well-written episode.

So there is a great potential for losers — and unnecessarily so.

The simplest way out of this conundrum is to create a media-related category so that literary works compete with others of their ilk and television and radio programs are compared on the same criteria and receive the recognition they merit. It would introduce a measure of fairness to the circumstance and also help raise the profile of the awards among the popular media.

I've made this point almost two years ago and in the time that has followed, nothing has happened.

The argument was put forward that the Aurora Awards are patterned after the Hugo Awards and thus that is why it includes the "other" category. My response at the time and is still "so what."

Patterning after a prestigious award such as the Hugo shouldn't preclude adapting the Aurora's so that they meet the realities and diversity of science fiction and fantasy in Canada. The Aurora's are, after all, and should reflect Canadian values and sensibilities.

To the people, publications, organizations and programs that will appear on the final ballot, we at Parsec would like to extend our congratulations and best wishes for the fall. We look forward to seeing you at Canvention.

— Chris

P.S.

For a copy of the final ballot, Internet users can go to http://www.sentex.net/~dmullin/aurora

Sci•fi stereotypes have got to stop

OK, I'm really upset with the CBC (radio 1) this morning. They had an interview with Robert Sawyer. I knew there would be a plug for Ad Astra and I wanted to hear what would be said.

Mr. Sawyer did a great job and was even fair enough to mention that there were other conventions in the Toronto Area!

However, the interviewer threw in a curve (I'm sure it caught Mr. Sawyer off guard). He referred to Star Trek fans dressing up like Mr. Spock and shooting their ray guns and nothing but a bunch of kids.

I was outraged! I've both left a voice-mail on their voice-mail box and e-mailed them (metromorning@toronto.cbc.ca) the following message:

"Ad Astra is a wonderful convention and I'm very happy you had a conversation with Mr. Sawyer this morning.

"However, I was rather upset by Andy's statement of Star Trek fans. Once again the media focuses on the sensational rather than the facts.

Star Trek fans do NOT all dress up like Captain Kirk or Mr. Spock any more than all gay men act feminine or that all blacks can dance. It's a stereotype and EXTREMELY insulting.

As one of the organizers of the not-for-profit event Toronto Trek, I have never dressed up in a costume and neither has the vast majority of the attendees.

However, what is wrong with dressing up in a " costume"? Don't most sport fans own a jersey of their favorite team or player?

This year we have more than 150 guest speakers which include various Canadian Authors and scientist. With more than 200 hours of programming we not only try to entertain fans, but educate them. Plus our charity auction which has raised more than $36,000 over the last five years to support Ronald McDonald House.

Rather than repeating a stereotype why doesn't the CBC take the high ground and educate the general public. I challenge CBC and it's listeners to get the facts for themselves."

I'll admit I'm a CBC listener (I wasn't tuning in just to hear Mr. Sawyer) but I cannot believe what I thought would be a factual interview, had such tabloid news statements. (I foolishly thought the CBC cared about the facts and not sensationalism.

Gee, I wonder why we've become cynical of the press?)

Such a stereotype statement and so insulting. I'm sure all of you know most people, when you say you are a science fiction fan, grouped with the Star Trek fans. I know most fans don't like being called a Star Trek fan for this very stereotypical reason.

So, if you listen to the CBC (or even if you don't) I suggest you write them. Let them know you're out there and you don't like being described as a "person dressed up as Mr. Spock, playing with your ray guy teenager."

We have to stop these types of outrageous statements.

STEPHEN CHRISTIAN
Toronto

☆ Stephen Christian is co-chairman of Toronto Trek 12

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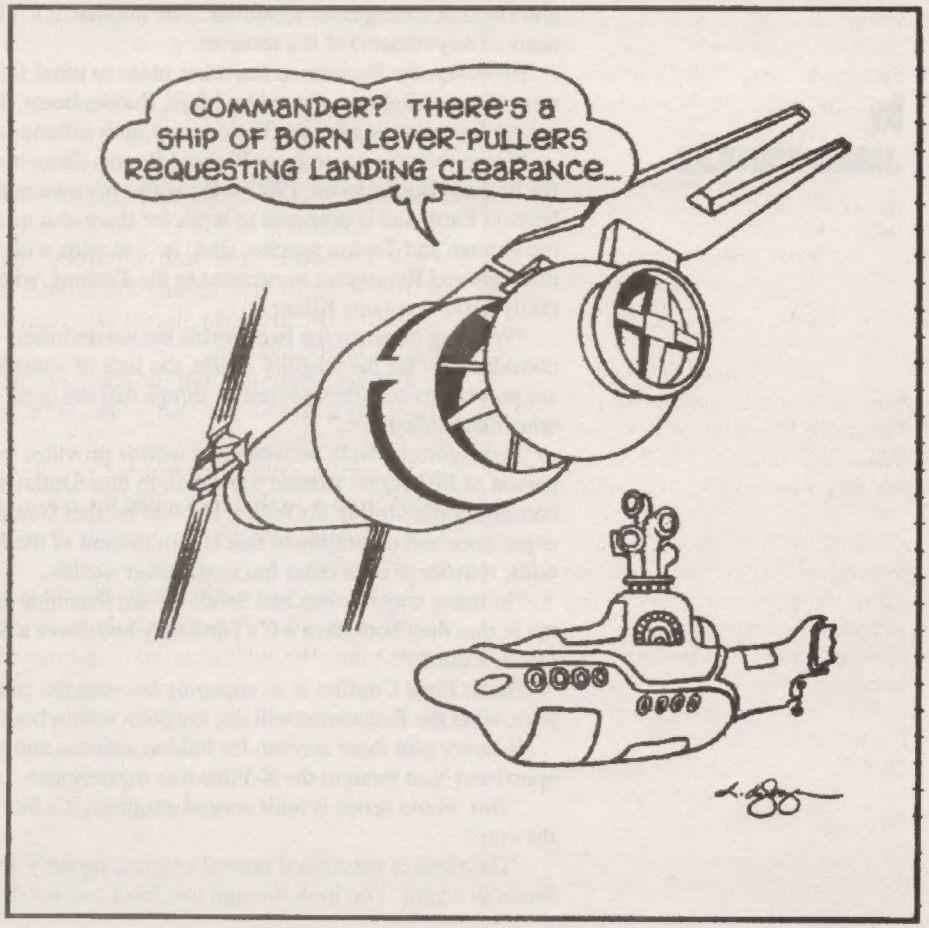
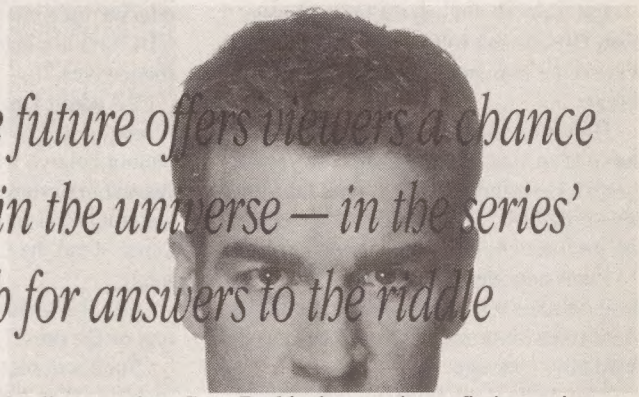


EARTH: FINAL CONFLICT

Gene Roddenberry's latest vision of the future offers viewers a chance to question their faith and their place in the universe – in the series' first season, Kevin Kilner led the search for answers to the riddle



By
JAMES BOUTILIER

He was poised to become the next leading man in a Gene Roddenberry science fiction series, Kevin Kilner (aka Taelon Security Commander William Boone), is eager and ready for the part. With a commanding presence, believable demeanor and, as expected from a potential hero, charm to match, Earth: Final Conflict has in Kilner, a strong and engaging performer, also one half of the Romulus/ Remus conflict which colors the show!

Implanted upon being chosen by the Taelons, Boone, previously a police officer who saved Ambassador Da'an from an assassination attempt, becomes the Companions' Security Commander and Head of Interspecies Relations. The implant, a CVI is meant to refocus the loyalties and emotions (if any remain) of it's receiver.

However, the Resistance has other plans in mind for Boone. With the help of Resistance sympathizer Doctor Belman, played by Majel Roddenberry, the underground and Captain Lili Marquette have a few surprises for the Taelons and their infamous CVI! ENTER DOUBLE AGENT BOONE.

"Gene took the name from Richard Boone. Gene wrote some episodes of Have Gun Will Travel for Richard Boone in the 1960's. He walks his own path between the Taelons, who have landed here on Earth and is prepared to work for them as a sort of ambassador and problem solver between the Human and Taelon species, (but) he's at odds with them over how they do things. And the underground Resistance movement to the Taelons, will do almost anything to find out why they are really here," explains Kilner.

"Walking between the two worlds Boone definitely is at odds with both sides over their lack of consideration for the fragility of life, the lack of consideration for other living people. The Taelons are proving to do, albeit secretive, things that are quite questionable and he's trying to find out what these things are."

This tightrope walk between two worlds provides the show with great conflict, especially in the person of FBI Agent Ronald Sandavol, in that Sandavol is now Da'an's personal bodyguard and is constantly monitoring his fellow Implant brother Boone! It is a love, hate relationship, a sharing of experience and commitment that is reminiscent of the Romulus and Remus myth, two brothers at odds, mirrors of each other but in different worlds.

"In many ways Boone and Sandavol are Romulus and Remus in my mind. They are like brothers in that they both have a CVI and they both have a Skrill (?) They are the yin and yang moon of Da'an's Earth!"

Earth: Final Conflict is so engaging because the entire series is a mystery, why the Taelons are here, what the Resistance will do, loyalties within both species.

In every plot there is room for hidden agendas and seeing the story from many different perspectives! You thought the X-Files was mysterious!

"This whole series is built around enigmas, it's like a giant onion, peeling it slowly, what's at the core?

"The show is predicated around enigma, mystery and multiple points of view, like multiple facets in a gem. You look through one facet and see one thing, a little to the side and you could be

something else. We are trying to stay away from dumb TV!"

Kilner originally passed on Earth: Final Conflict because he was already a busy person with current projects in television and feature film.

These projects include the feature, Home Alone 3 and 4 shooting in Chicago, a guest spot on the series Poltergeist, Movies of the Week including, Time Piece with James Earl Jones, and another feature film called Music From Another Room, shot in LA. This all shortly after ending a year stint on the comedy series Almost Perfect (which got canned shorty after Kilner left).

"So, I was going between Chicago and LA and my agent sent me a script for this show . . . He said I know you are doing these movies, but I want you to take a look at this because this was a script Majel Roddenberry had found in Gene's papers. He said no matter how many times I read it all I can think about is you in this role. I read it and like the character immediately and the world they created."

From there, he met David Kirschner and Roddenberry, asking many questions and liking their response.

"I didn't let them talk, I asked a lot of questions about their shooting day, the concept of the world and what the spark of the journey for this character would be, and I was very compelled by their answers.

"Then I got scared because my girlfriend (actress Jordan Baker of the series Hillar and Dillar) couldn't come to Toronto to work and at the eleventh hour I said No . . . she's too important to me!

"A month went by and they screen tested other guys. Unbenounced to me, Majel called David and said 'I'm still thinking it's Kevin,' and David said 'It's always been, he's the one I wanted all along.' So he said make me an offer that's more inticing, And They Did!"

And Miss Baker will be able to commute once a month to see him too.

What really encouraged Kilner was the fact that his suggestions were taken seriously and used.

"They promised me I could be a full participant in the creative process of the character and stories in the writing room (and) they'll let me direct one. So, I said let's do it. All of which happened in a six to seven week period."

ABOUT THE CHARACTERS...

Captain Lili Marquette:

"Lili Marquette is Boone's partner, in some ways he looks out for her and she looks out for him. She's no nonsense, she will call him on his behavior if he's acting in a way that for her is out of line.

"She's very tough and very smart. She is truly his partner in solving this riddle of what they are doing here."

Ronald Sandavol:

"Sandavol and Boone are similar to Harrison Ford and Tommy Lee Jones in The Fugitive, they are in a race against each other, against time, and yet they begin to understand each other and they begin to appreciate and respect each other at the same time. They are the light and dark reflections of each other in some ways . . . He has his own agenda, which may be a separate agenda from Da'an!"

Ambassador Da'an:

"Da'an is the Buddha, mythic-like fig-

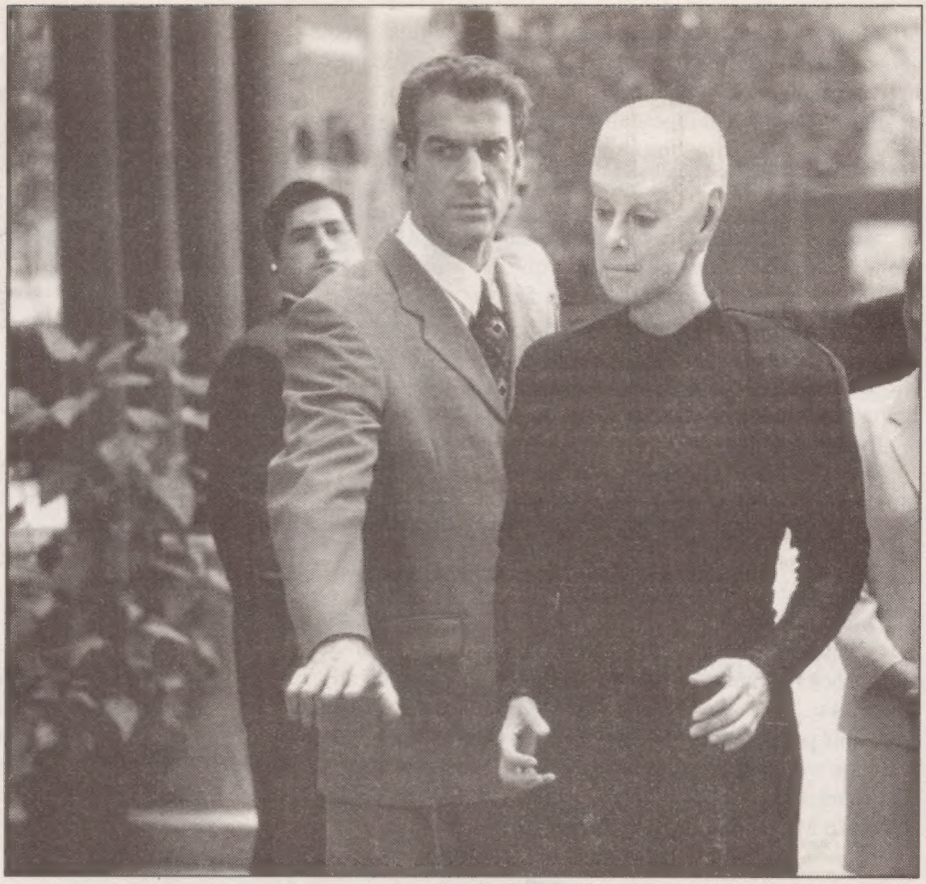


Photo by Michael Grecco courtesy of Atlantis/Tribune

"Da'an is the Buddha," says Kevin Kilner, whose character of William Boone was busy during the first season of Earth: Final Conflict trying to solve the riddle presented by the aliens' presence on Earth.

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ure of wisdom and intelligence. All of us are enigmas on the show, Da'an is the biggest enigma, the most complex, the wisest, has very much to impart. Yet Da'an is open enough to take in and digest all that he is seeing of humanity and the enigmas, the lovely aspects, the horrific aspects of humanity.

"Some Taelons have a view of humans the way we view dolphins, highly evolved mammals, but they are still below us. Da'an is on a journey toward finding mutual respect for humans and their complexities.

"Da'an is the mythic elevated magician in the structure of mythology."

Jonathan Doors:

He is the King Lear figure, he may be quite mad, he is certainly quite intelligent, very powerful, he has fingers and arms that reach deep into all areas of society, all over the world. He is the shadow figure."

Doctor Belman:

"Doctor Belman is also a member of the Resistance movement along with Jonathan Doors and Lili Marquette. She is the surgeon who has done all the CVI implants up to this point. Boone uses her as counsel. He goes to her in the way one would go to a wise counsellor . . . someone who is a scientist and a humanitarian as well. She's also turning out to be, thanks to Majel's acting, very comedic."

I believe in God and have respect for all people's paths to their god, however they get there. I believe Boone feels the same way.

Augur:

"At one point, Boone calls him the ultimate home entrepreneur. He is the wild element, the spice, someone who by computer is linked up all over the world, into all sorts of businesses, some might call them scandals. He is a constant source to Boone for secret information."

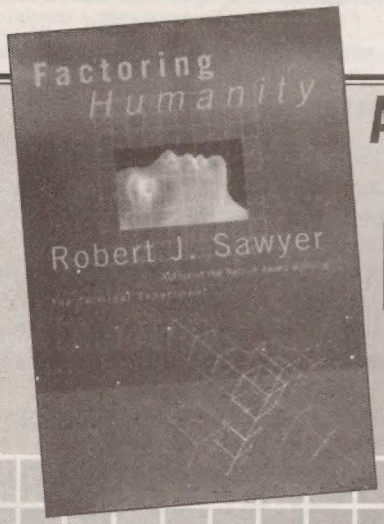
HAVING FAITH

An important issue the show brings up is that of religion, faith and finding your path, especially in the episode Miracles. For Boone, it is a struggle he constantly faces considering his many heart breaks in life and the appearance of the highly evolved visitors with extraordinary powers.

"At one point, he confesses to the young girl in this episode who loses her hands, that in those darkest moments (01 War) he lost trust in everything because he was lied to. When he met his wife, he regained trust. But when she dies, he again lost trust in the idea that everything is what it seems. He believes that nothing is what it seems, that below the surface there are things going on we have to find out. Definitely he questions everything."

But what about Kilner?

"I believe in God and have respect for all people's paths to



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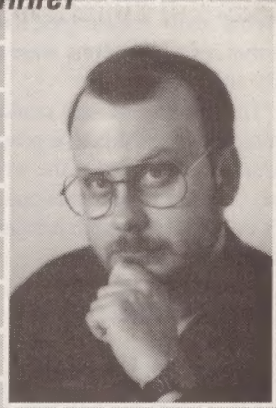

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their god, however they get there. I believe Boone feels the same way."

For Kilner, this episode in particular deals with the danger of turning religion into idolatry.

"There is a fine line that we question about when Da'an becomes the focus of idolatry. When does faith cross over to idolatry, and that may be the only thing that we are questioning . . . When you make something living and breathing into a statue, you really cross the line."

But where does Kilner the person leave off and the character begin?

"In the beginning, I thought I had a good idea what it was. It's just a really hard question to answer because in the creative process it's almost amorphic.

"You'll still find things that shock me that I'm doing that are either him and not like me, or I'm at home doing something and I'll go 'I just did that on the set!' So the best way to answer that is, I continually go back and forth like a two way stream between finding out what's me that's brough to him, and then what's him that are brought to me, sort of an exchange of information."

WHAT is Kevin's impression of Earth: Final Conflict and it's creator Gene Roddenberry?

"It's a testament to him that his imagination was so vast and broad that he said OK, I'm going to the other side of the circle and do something grittier, based on Earth and is an Earth we recognize not too far into the future.

"The Taelon architecture, Da'an's office,Boone's office, it's hallucinatory — closer to trees and plants . . . I'd just like to tip my hat to Gene because saying, 'I'm going to literally bring it down to Earth and really play with the idea of mixing something from a very advanced species with a planet we know well. He really was a visionary!"

Photo courtesy of Atlantis Films Ltd.

All the characters on Earth: Final Conflict are enigmas, according to Kevin Kilner. The characters (the human ones) try to solve their questions of faith and the riddle of the Taelons.

And it is this vision that will attract fans, holding them is another matter.

"I hope that all Gene's fans will tune in, and then they're going to have to make up their own minds, as they should. They'll come to it because of the legacy of Gene . . . but from Episode Two on, unfortunately, Gene didn't write other scripts, we have to rely on ourselves."

So why will Earth: Final Conflict appeal to so many, as some experts says it will?

"The series will be looking for things that reflect ambiguity, complexity, so that all people can look at this and glean from it what they want and can see the multiple opinions you can have at any particular moment or particular story." ☆

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SIDEBAR

In Earth: Final Conflict, Majel Roddenberry brings to fruition both a long displaced Gene Roddenberry sci-fi thriller and brings Nurse Chapel of the original Star Trek series full circle.

Off the backburner

By
JAMES BOUTILIER

It had been destined for the backburner in the seventies, due to the determination of this true to form creation of Gene Roddenberry, now Earth: Final Conflict seems destined to become the Sleeper Hit Sci-Fi series of the Nineties.

Perhaps, the whole journey of Star Trek and Earth: Final Conflict has followed a sort of predetermined path as luck would have it.

For if Gene Roddenberry had followed through on his original plans to make Spector in the seventies, we perhaps wouldn't have had the long line of Star Trek feature films that still continue to this day!

"Gene and I were in England shooting the show Spector for 20th (Century FOX) for which he had a three pilot deal and word came over they wanted it right away. No sooner did he send it back and Paramount called and said we're going to do the first Star Trek movie now, so Gene told 20th let's put this on the backburner until later, and it just never came off the backburner.

"It was out of sight out of mind for Gene.

"While pulling all of his papers together there were boxes and boxes, I was just trying to get the same subject matter together and came across all this stuff. I thought it was good then, it's really good now! So I brought it out and took it to CAA and they introduced me to a bunch of producers. I guess anybody could have made it, but it wasn't until I got to David Kirschner that something happened in like 10 minutes. It was a foregone conclusion that this was the one that had to be, because he reminded me so much of the way Gene thought and spoke, and so we did become partners.

"And one year later, here we are doing it. It's all been so phenomenal, it's happened so rapidly."

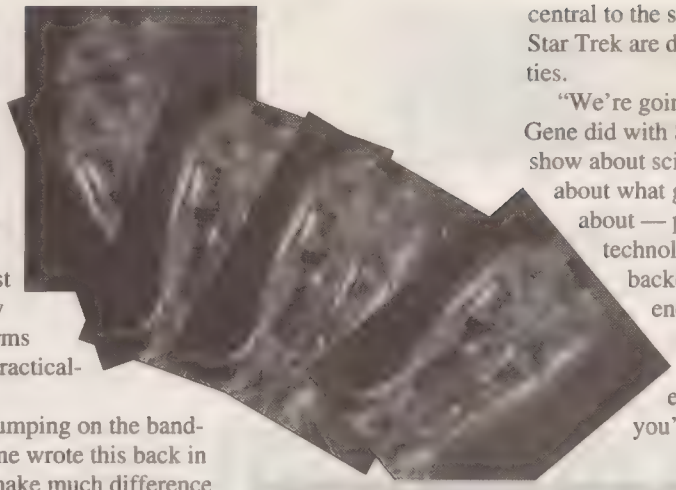
In fact, the partnership between Kirschner and Roddenberry worked so well on Earth, that they have created a new production company for future creations.

"I'm enjoying the relationship very much and he enjoys the

projects. So we would like to keep our relationship going in this direction."

Compared to current science fiction fare, Final Conflict shies away from the budget-busting special effects. Instead, its plots focus on the characters and their interactions.

"Gene always took earth out to space, in this case he turned the tables and brought space down to earth. It takes place in the first decade of the new millennium and it's really a case of thinking in large science fiction terms but still keeping that television production practicality. It's about the alien invasion of earth.



"Sure it's familiar and everyone's been jumping on the bandwagon lately, but you have to remember Gene wrote this back in 1976, so he did it first! That doesn't really make much difference because we're not going to deal with the invasion, that's best left to those one-shot movies. What we're going to deal with is much more imaginative, realistic situation, again using the themes Gene's always used — peace, tolerance and a lot of environmental responsibility. We haven't hit on that too much before but it's going to be a lot of this one. And of course, Gene's greatest subject, The greatness of the human spirit.

"There are 71 aliens, Taelons, and are placed in different places around the world. You're going to look at them and say they're good guys, they're bringing us cures and bringing us their vast technology. We have a catch phrase, No war, no disease, no hunger but No Choice! Which goes right down to the basics of what Gene has always said, that no matter what the rewards for obedience, or punishment for slavery or noncompliance, there is always going to be that part of humanity that will fight for individual freedom, because as he said, fat and happy slavery is none-the-less slavery."

The character of Ambassador Da'an, the enigmatic alien leader, was gleaned from an unfinished book Roddenberry had penned. Report From Earth, contains a character named Ga'an. Like the Final Conflict character, Ga'an is an alien visiting the planet to evaluate its population. Like Da'an, the character is also sexually ambiguous. It is a circumstance that Roddenberry says may not be that odd in the grand scheme of things.

"Perhaps, we're the oddity because of this sex thing, and all the rest of the universe is like Da'an," she points out.

"Gene was such a positive person that he only thought in terms of something living — his cup was never half empty. This is very dear to my heart. Our global village is getting a lot smaller and we're going to show how every living thing on our planet can work together to defend and protect our home against a take over Now I don't believe in little green men, but sooner or later we can't really ignore the fact that there has to be some intelligent life out there, if not we're wasting a lot of space!"

Of course, the aliens' presence is not without its opposition.

"The group we are dealing with is the Resistance, we are going to have a mixed group of characters. They aren't unlike the Star Trek roles, but lead by a very unusual man. So while we can root for our characters as the good guys, we're going to get the full dramatic spectrum of them as being hunter as criminals, terrorists. There's the whole mess of double agenting here. It's fun to figure out. The Companions, they want the things any oppressors want, material wealth of the planet and our industrial capacity, and of course the slave labor to handle it. They have another purpose which is far more deadly."

Even though they share creators and alien characters who are central to the show, Final Conflict and Star Trek are distinctly different entities.

"We're going to do the same thing Gene did with Star Trek, this is not a show about science or technology, it's about what good drama is always about — people. The science and technology is background and backdrop, it's how that science and technology affects people, which does put us on a different level from the stuff you're used to seeing, especially where aliens are concerned."

The character of Ambassador Da'an, the enigmatic alien leader, was gleaned from an unfinished book Roddenberry had penned.

The Difference?

"Number one, we're not going to eat anybody! We are going to prey upon the human frailties, we're going to do stories about things all intelligent beings experience.

"V" did not emphasize those particular elements. The strange thing was "V" was stolen from Gene because it came out of the same studio, a year or two afterwards. Gene thought for a while we'd do something, but we had so many friends at the studio and we were making movies now. I think it was a relief to him because when he saw it he said it was awful! There was nothing inside of these characters, I didn't feel for any of them, they were so cardboard."

Another parallel between the two series can be found in the medical aspect of Roddenberry's roles on the two series.

"How about it I finally made that. I had to be convinced to do the character because to me it was a cardboard character, but I couldn't resist the fact that I knew the fans were out there and would want it so much, so I said let's go with it and we'll juice it up and make something more out of it as long as it doesn't take up a lot of time.

"Dr. Beltram is an intelligent woman, however, she has lived. This is a woman over 40 and that was the one nice thing about Loixanna (TNG), she still had a verve for life, things are not over for women over 40, and in this case they're not either.

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She has a past, she's gonna have a big future and she's not going to miss anything in the middle. She's not just responsible for sticking large needles into peoples' heads and inserting CVI's. She's really Doors right-hand man. So she is a double agent in her own right too. However with Doors she is his go between, his hostess and obviously? There's going to be a lot of mystery about her, and I never had that to work with before. I love the sneaking around in dark spaces, popping up here and there. The other fun thing, which I'm not going to tell you either, you're going to find her popping up in place you can believe she is!"

After the Roddenberrys' labored experiences with television networks interfering with their works, an older and wiser Roddenberry has learned one valuable lesson: If you want to have your work represented the way you envisioned, rethink network involvement and its an involvement that has resulted in a lot of meddling in Roddenberry's creations over the years. Despite the less than ideal relationship, there is one aspect of the experience that has made up for the meddling.

"I have nurtured the fans for 30 years, because if it weren't for them we just wouldn't be here, and we wouldn't be doing this show. They have loved us, and in turn, Gene did this, he said they deserve something because they are smart people, he said I needed somebody to talk to, he couldn't with the networks because the censorship was so bad . . . so he finally found the audience! Gene and I have always been receptive to fandom, and I hope that will pay off here and I'm hoping they like it."

Since her husband's death in 1991, Roddenberry has worked to protect her husband's legacy from those who would despoil it or simply misinterpret his intentions.

"I've known Gene since 1961. I know what he would be thinking. I know his thought processes," she points out. "I'm the one most-qualified to judge what he would have thought about the series (Final Conflict) or Star Trek."

When it comes to Star Trek, she is confident that the vision has remained intact. Gene Roddenberry trained executive producer Michael Berman in the ways of all things Trek.

" Gene always said space is not our final frontier, the human soul is. All these things we are taking into consideration."

☆

With Files from C. Krejlgaard

The next Spock?

The actress behind the make-up knows there's a good chance her character on Earth: Final Conflict will become another science fiction icon

By
CHRIS KREJLGAARD

There is a hint of anticipation in Leni Parker's voice when she discusses her role of Da'an on Earth: Final Conflict.

She knows the track record of aliens in his creations and it is a daunting record.

Spock and Worf. Two (or is it technically three) different series, two different actors and two science fiction icons.

Parker knows that she and her character have the potential to join the Vulcan and Klingon at the forefront of the alien characters in the science fiction universe.

It is an exciting time for the Toronto-based actress. In November, she joined the rest of the series' cast at a Toronto sci-fi convention. During the visit a fan showed her a handmade Da'an doll. It was a symbol of what she and her character could become — icons, or at the very least, well-marketed products.

"The doll really did it for me. It's a little daunting," she said in reference to the possibility of Da'an keychains and Da'an mugs.

Aliens have played a fundamental role in any of Roddenberry's creations.

The interaction between human and alien provides the basis for the conflict in many of the storylines. But in Roddenberry's best known work, Star Trek, these meetings (at least initially) take place when humans travel out into the vast unknown of space.

It is on this point where Earth: Final Conflict breaks new ground. The series, based on a long-lost idea from the Great Bird of the Universe, examines what would happen if aliens came to Earth. It is Earth-based, rather than space-based, science fiction. It is a less-spectacular approach to science fiction on television.

Developing the character of Da'an wasn't too onerous a task for Parker. She had a good framework to draw from.

"Within the history of Gene Roddenberry's work, somehow in the writing he made it possible to develop as many kinds of aliens as you wanted. So I feel like I was given carte blanc on what kind of character to develop as well I had a strong visual in front of me to tell me which way the character was going to go visually," she explains.

In addition, Parker also is able to draw on an enviable source — Majel Roddenberry. As executive producer, she oversees the production and also has a recurring role. Since production began last year, Roddenberry has offered her insight into the character and the universe her late husband created.

The series is set during the decade that follows the first contact with the Taelons. With the aliens' help, mankind has brought an end to world hunger, disease and war. It has also led to an unquestioning trust in the aliens — something that has also given rise to a resistance movement among humans.

The resistance fighters are determined to learn the Taelons' ulterior motives and protect mankind from its benefactors.

Da'an is the Taelon's ambassador to Earth and as such provides a focal point for the conflict between humans and the alien visitors.

The series presents a change of pace for the Fredericton, N.B., native.

Since work began on Earth: Final Conflict, Leni Parker has been able to discuss the character of Da'an with Majel Roddenberry on many occasions. This has allowed the Canadian actress to gain insight into a character that provides the focal point for the series.

Parker studied acting at Concordia University in Montreal and spent 10 years with the Pigeon International Theatre. With the theatre troupe, Parker has performed in such works as Savage Love, Blood on the Cat's Neck and The Making of Macbeth. On television, she's appeared in Emily of New Moon and such movies as Mrs. Parker and the Round Table and Hemoglobin.

Unlike such dramas, series such as Earth: Final Conflict offer Parker a more-lasting effect with viewers.

"It was pretty dark work and you don't expect a following from that. And you also don't expect people to scrutinize those kinds of shows as much as they would a sci-fi show," Parker said.

In the time since the program began airing this fall, Parker has learned that the series has created a legions of fans.

"I was shocked to see that there was such a following," she said. "I am quite shocked to see that people are so involved in the show. I can understand it, but it's the first time that I've encountered something like this. It strengthens you and it's nice to see that people aren't missing a beat and understand the show."

Eugene ready to pick up mantle of Roddenberry legacy

"I can see so much of Gene in him," Majel Roddenberry said of her son Eugene (Gene Jr.).

It's little wonder that the younger Roddenberry makes his living as an advisor on Earth: Final Conflict.

Last season, the Toronto resident served in the visual effects department and as a technical advisor. He'll hold down the same job when the show begins production of its second season next month.

"I get a copy of each script and review it to make sure it holds to Gene Roddenberry's philosophy, if it has a message," he explained. "But I'm only an advisor, so they can ignore what I have to say if they want to."

One of Roddenberry's main tasks is to compile the series' "bible." The bible provides guidance for the series and its characters.

According to Roddenberry, it provides background on all the various elements of the show so that consistency can be maintained from one episode to the next and from one season to the next. It also provides some direction to the actors who may question their characters motivation.

"In order to be successful as a show, you need to plot out the main points of the show, you need to plot out the characters," he said.

But as essential as the task may seem, Roddenberry notes that the bible was rarely consulted and character traits and background elements were made up as the show's first season progressed.

As a result, Roddenberry says the characters haven't reached their full potential — with a couple of exceptions.

"Da'an is a great character and Leni Parker is a fantastic actress," he enthused. "She has made Da'an energetic and interesting."

The other exception is Von Flores' character, Sandoval. Although in this case, the character still has a way to go.

"Sandoval could really be a bad guy that viewers could actually feel sorry for," Roddenberry explained. "In Sandoval's Run, we learned some of his background and that there is a method to his evil.

"But he still needs to be fleshed out more."

Roddenberry has taken a stab at writing an episode during the past season. It wasn't as satisfying a process as he would have liked.

"I like writing and developing story ideas," he said. Essentially, he pitched an idea for an episode that was reworked by other writers. Although he shared writing credit, he was less than pleased with the way the matter was handled.

"They wanted to get my name up there on the screen."

That is the downside of being Gene Roddenberry's son.

"There's been many pluses and an equal amount of negatives," he explains. "I get special treatment and I shouldn't. People aren't honest with me in their criticism of my work.

"It's the butt end of Hollywood."

If it seems that Roddenberry is somewhat frustrated with the process of series television, you can sympathize with his plight .

"Every week it's Gene Roddenberry's Earth: Final Conflict," he points out. "It's not David Kirschner who fails or just Earth: Final Conflict that fails. It's Gene Roddenberry who fails. It's my name riding up there."

Like his mother, he protects the legacy left behind by his father.

"I'm proud of what my father accomplished," Roddenberry said. "I used to want to be called Rod, now I'm happy to be called Gene.

"And I want to uphold what Gene Roddenberry stood for and continue his work."

Roddenberry was 18 when his father died. There is some regret when he speaks about the man who created the legacy of Star Trek.

"He was just dad. He was a great father, but we never talked on an intelligent level," Roddenberry explains. "I was a rebellious teen. I took the car when I wasn't supposed to, I snuck out of the house. We never sat down and talked shop.

"Since he's been gone, I began to realize what a loss it was that we didn't talk about things like philosophy or writing.

"Now I just want to pick up where he left off."

* * *

Want to contact Gene Roddenberry Jr.?

He can be reached at http://www.philosophysphere.com. The site contains information about Gene Sr., Earth: Final Conflict and hosts the occasional chat.

— CHRIS KREJLGAARD

Diversity touchstone of Babylon 5 veteran Bill Mumy

By
CHRIS KREJLGAARD

To say Bill Mumy's professional life has been eclectic is an understatement.

He's on the brink of entering his fourth decade as an actor, he's worked as a television creator and producer, he's an accomplished musician and composer, he's a published author and he's created some intriguing comic book characters such as Tryto the Acid Dog.

To baby boomers, he will always be Will Robinson, the best bud of Dr. Smith and the Robot on the Lost in Space television series. To current science fiction fans, Mumy (pronounced Moo-me) is Lennier the Minbari aide on Babylon 5.

With the end of Babylon 5 — at least as a series — Bill Mumy will be turning his attention to performing around California with his band.

Photo courtesy of and © Warner Brothers International Television

Mumy was all for the evolution of the relationship of Lennier and Delenn to something more than simply professional.

Mumy had just finished a season as host of the science fiction program, Inside Space (where he did one of the last on-camera interviews with Carl Sagan), when series creator J. Michael Straczynski came calling for him.

The character first appeared in the series' sixth episode.

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With the framework for the series' five-year run already mapped out before the first episode was shot, you'd think that there was little room for an actor to bring some flavor to a character.

Wrong.

"All of the major characters on Babylon 5 went through arcs and the majority of those arcs were in place, some of them were more fluid than others in terms of being able to change," Mumy explained. "I think Lennier was one those in terms of that adaptability."

Mumy's background as an established science fiction writer, as well as his relationship with the series' advisor Harlan Ellison, allowed him to help shape the character more than some of the other main actors.

"Joe was very receptive to my ideas from the beginning."

For example, Mumy says it was his idea that Lennier be more than devoted to Ambassador Delenn (the Minbari official he has been assigned to assist) and that the character actually be in love with her.

"Joe said 'That's great. Let's go with that but let's play it very subtle'," Mumy recalled. "So we actually began playing it that way very early in the second season and didn't expose that to the audience until season four."

Mumy's character plays a large role in the last episode filmed this year (the series' finale had been filmed last year in case Babylon 5 wasn't renewed for a fifth season).

It will be an episode that will, by Mumy's account, "Blow people away.

"A lot of what was coming, came at the very end for Lennier."

The finale is scheduled to air on the U.S. network, TNT, before the summer. But given the series' sporadic airing in Canada during the past three seasons, it's anyone's guess when viewers north of the border will get to see the conclusion.

After five years of working on the series, you'd expect that Mumy would be a little depressed about not working with the rest of the cast on a weekly basis. But, perhaps because of spending 39 years in show business, Mumy is a tad more realistic about the change

"That's the nature of the industry," he said. "You go into a project and you know it's going to come to an end.

"It's not like I'll never see them again. I can see them whenever I want and I don't have to wear rubber on my head when I do."

But while the series creator and executive producer stuck to his plan to end the series after the lengthy story arc was completed, there is still a story or two left to tell.

Mumy explained that while the original cast members are not going to be part of the planned television movies based on Babylon 5, the same cannot be said for the possible big-screen version of the series.

"Joe called us all together one day and said that there might be an opportunity for a feature film," Mumy recalled. "I would love to be part of that project."

With the end of filming, Mumy looks for a new acting challenge.

And the past five years have been full of challenges. For the first time in his lengthy career, Mumy had to deal with the problems presented by portraying a character that required make-up and prosthetics.

It was not an experience that he rel-

ished.

"It truly freaked me out. I went to them in the first season and said 'I can't do this every day.' The make up was killing me; I had no idea what I was getting into when I agreed to five years on the show," he said of the make-up procedure that takes about a total of five hours to complete.

"I said 'if you have any plans to make Lennier a focal point of the show, then I can't do it'."

In response to Mumy's request, Straczynski altered the actor's schedule so that he worked an average of three days a week during the season. This allowed his skin to recover from the abrasive effects of the solvents used to remove the heavy make-up.

"It's something that you never get used to," he added.

The Past

During the 1960s, Mumy was the most visible — and busiest child actors.

He has appeared in movies such as Palm Springs Weekend and Papillon, appeared in more than 150 television episodes of programs ranging from Bewitched to The Fugitive to Twilight Zone (where he appeared in the memorable episodes The Good Life and In Praise of Pip).

I've never lost my love for the arena of adventure and science fiction. What's not to love?

Along the way he had the opportunity to work with some of the most-noted actors and directors of the day (some for all time).

Among the list of these professionals you will find such notables as James Stewart, Steve McQueen, Dustin Hoffman, Jack Klugman, Rod Serling, Alfred Hitchcock (who he says was "a---ole.")

It is an enviable body of work and even after growing up in the business, Mumy is still as excited about his various projects as he was when he watched Superman and Zorro as a boy and decided that he wanted to be an actor."I've never lost my love for the arena of adventure and science fiction.

"What's not to love?"

Even with such a sizeable and diverse resume, Mumy is still known to a generation of television fans as Will Robinson.

There he spent three seasons traversing the cosmos in search of either Alpha Centauri or Earth.

During the show's run, he and Jonathan Harris (OK, and the robot) formed a relationship where it was hard to tell just who was the adult.

"We're the Mick and Keith of science fiction," Mumy says of his long-time relationship with Harris.

Mumy is still in touch with the people he says "are truly like a second family to me.

"I still talk to Angela (Cartwright —Penny) almost every day and I talk to Jonathan about once a week," he explains.

And, was the case with the other performers and professionals behind the camera, Mumy learned facets of his craft from the theatre-trained Harris.

"You can't work with someone who has been in the business as long as Jonathan has and not learn things," he said. "Did I learn from James Stewart, or Lucille Ball or Rod Serling, of course I did.

"Unless your senses are dull, how can you not learn from what's going on around you?"

Unlike the other actors of such well-known series, Mumy didn't suffer from any typecasting thanks, in part, to the physical changes all 14 year olds go through.

When Lost in Space left the air in 1968, Mumy went to work on the Disney film, Rascal. Then came some episodic work and the movie, Bless the Beasts and the Children.

Then at 17, he made a career decision and stopped acting to tour with his band (a move which he regrets in hindsight).

"I thought we were going to be the next Crosby, Stills and Nash," he says with a chuckle. "I wanted to take a year or two off, go to college and study some music and really devote a year or two to that group, so I couldn't say that I didn't give it my best shot.

"Unfortunately, we didn't become the next Crosby, Stills and Nash. But we did make some really good music."

Looking back, Mumy said he should have kept acting while he pursued his musical career.

"I was at the point where I could pick a picture and I regret not making a picture a year," he adds. "But we all make bad decisions when we're 17."

Not that he's done too shabbily as a musician. Mumy is adept at the guitar, bass, keyboards, banjo, mandolin and percussion instruments.

He also performed in the band backing up then-teen idol Shaun Cassidy and toured with America. "I wouldn't give that experience up for anything," he says of his time with Cassidy's tour. "That was like being in a Hard Day's Night.

I was at the point where I could pick a picture and I regret not making a picture a year. But we all make bad decisions when we're 17.

"If you listen to his live albums, you can hear we weren't playing sappy ballads, we were playing some good rock'n'roll. It was pretty much a good kick-ass band."

He has collaborated on seven albums with Barnes & Barnes (including the infamous Fish heads song) and is currently planning to appear with his current band, Jenerators, around southern California.

Before joining Babylon 5, Mumy worked as a composer on the Disney Channel's Adventures in Wonderland where he wrote 125 songs for the100 of the show's episodes. He has also provided scores for such shows as Santa Barbara and The Universe and I.

After returning to the big screen in Papillon, he took on a regular role in the series, Sunshine and even wrote an episode. The show's cancellation pretty much marked the end of television work for him during the next few years as the music and other projects took precedence.

Since the '80s he has also worked periodically as a writer in the comic book industry. Most recently, his work can be seen in Aquaman and an upcoming Spectre story.

While working on Babylon 5, he worked as co-creator, writer and co-producer on the Montreal-based Space Cases — a science fiction program aimed at the pre-teen set.

As Mumy's career on Babylon 5 closes, another member of the family is making inroads as an actor.

Mumy's son, Seth, is following in dad's footsteps. Only five years old, he already has three feature films under his belt — Three Wishes, Dear God and Paulie.

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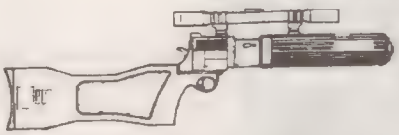

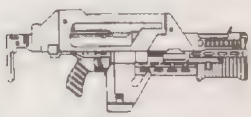

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B.C. artist shows dreams do come true

A run during the 'revival' of the webcrawler was the product of a perseverance and a long-time desire to work on comic books

By
GREGG CHAMBERLAIN

Photo by Gregg Chamberlain

A chance to work with Alan Moore was what pried Steve Skroce from the pages of the Amazing Spider-Man and put him to work on Awesome Entertainment's, Youngblood.

Ask comic artist Steve Skroce for advice and he just grins.

"Buy multiple copies of Spider-Man," he said, " because it will be worth money in 10 years."

He should know. He drew more than half a dozen issues of the adventures of Marvel's wall-crawling superhero during what he calls "the revival of Marvels number one superhero."

For Skroce (pronounced "skrowse"), it's a dream come true but one that's been a long time coming for the 25-year-old Canadian who knew as a child that he wanted to draw comics for a living.

"When I was in the eighth grade, I started to mail in Xerox copies to the editors. I'd get the form letters back. After awhile I started getting them back with little comments like 'You're OK for your age.' 'Read this, do that.'

"The little comments kept me hungry."

At a comic convention in San Diego, California he got to talk to some of those editors face to face. Three months later the phone rang.

"Boy, was I happy that day."

On the line was Mark McLaurin with an offer for Skroce to do some art for Ectokid comics, part of Marvel's Clive Barker line. That was in 1993. Then he got to draw the Cable series of mutant superhero adventures.

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"That was my big break because it was a fairly popular book." Cable evolved into the X-Man and Skroce kept on drawing the series as well as badgering Marvel for more assignments.

"I kept asking them to (let me) draw Amazing Spider-Man." He chuckled. "I just wore them down."

At that time, X-Man, which Skroce was working on, was the more popular book. Amazing Spider-man, Marvel's flagship comic for decades, had declined in popularity. Most fans attribute the reason to the dark and macabre Peter Parker clone storyline. That didn't matter to Skroce. He wanted to draw Spider-Man.

"I felt Spider-Man would be popular again."

He noted that all of the Spider-Man books were getting creative jumpstarts through a combination of new artists and storylines which were returning to the character's roots — a mixture of action-adventure, soap opera, and humor. Skroce wanted to be part of that process of rebirth. During his stint on the comic, he tried hard to make sure his work didn't seem like a carbon-copy of past artists like Todd McFarlane — another Canadian credited with revolutionizing the look of Spider-Man during his stint with the series.

"Like it or hate it, I'd like it (art) to at least be something of my own."

A typical work day usually starts around seven or eight o'clock. How long Skroce spends at the drawing board can vary.

"Sometimes you draw really quickly and be done in eight hours. Other days, maybe it takes a while. It really varies. Sometimes I'm up until midnight, others I'm off at three."

He chuckled. "I could use more of the 'off at three.'"

Skroce and Tom DeFalco, the series writer at the time, talked over story ideas on the phone. DeFalco then wrote out the plot, get editorial approval on it and sends Skroce a copy from New York City so he could start drawing. They held phone or fax discussions about particular scenes before the finished art is turned in. The Marvel-style of creating a comic appeals to Skroce with its 50-50 approach of writer and artist contributing ideas to the finished product.

"In Amazing Spider-man, I got to put my two cents in. Tight scenes and such, I come up with."

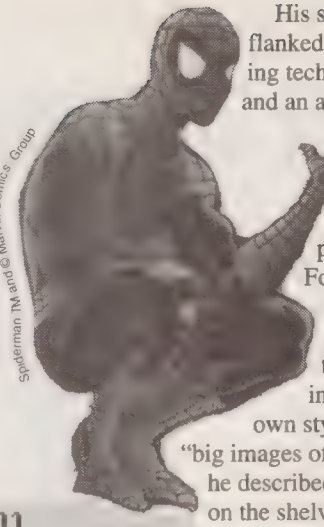
While he could work from a more structured script, "if it's really good," the Marvel style gives him artistic breathing room. Even if he did have to have the work ready within four weeks — less if there's pressure for a particular issue. "Then it was drawing every day."

After achieving his dream, Skroce left the title after nine issues to pursue another dream — this time courtesy of a small independent Los Angeles publisher with the brash name Awesome Entertainment.

The company brought out a revamped version of Youngblood, the old Image Comics superhero team. What Awesome also offered was a chance to work with Alan (The Watchmen) Moore.

"That was my main reason for leaving Marvel. He and maybe two or three other comic book people helped legitimize the medium. I never knew when I would have a chance to work with him again."

Skroce's home/office is in an apartment building in a quiet residential section of Coquitlam, B.C.



His studio contains a drafting easel flanked by shelves of books on drawing techniques, reference manuals, and an assortment of superhero and science-fiction toys and models. Along the other walls superhero art marches side-by-side with posters for movies like Francis Ford Coppola's Dracula. A life-size Darth Vader mask sits on a shelf with a good view of the easel. All examples of the influences behind Skroce's own style, something more than just "big images of characters in cool poses" as he described most of the recent comic art on the shelves.

That was my main reason for leaving Marvel. He and maybe two or three other comic book people helped legitimize the medium. I never knew when I would have a chance to work with him again.

"What I like to do is bring some kind of choreography, like a Jackie Chan movie, where you watch it and say, 'Huh, never saw that before.'"

He cited a recent issue of Spider-man in which the superhero is fighting a group of ninjas in a meat plant. During one series of panels, Spider-man webs up two ninjas then rolls them up in some office carpeting and uses the ninja-stuffed carpet to bludgeon the rest.

"Rather than the usual 'POW!' swinging through the skylight and punching some guy."

A self-confessed film buff, except for what he calls "merchant movies" like Remains of the Day, much of his inspiration comes from outside the comic industry.

"A lot of ideas from Chinese action movies. They're kind of like big comics." Some of the wild battle scenes in many Hong Kong productions have "bigger-than-life action and way more cool ideas" than some current comic book art.

"It's what comics need is more cool ideas." Which, he added, may be the industry's problem in that many current writers and artists go back to comics for much of their inspiration.

"All of the best comic writers and artists are influenced from other areas." While Skroce himself acknowledged such industry influences as Michael Golden, Frank Miller, and fellow Canadian John Byrne, he also draws on his movie memories as well as a diverse range of reading from William Gibson to Carl Hiassen or Catherine Dunn.

Jack Kirby, during his early days at Marvel, just seemed to pump out art to fill almost every comic the company produced. He and Steve Ditko, Spider-man's original artist, were Marvel's mainstays then. Even now, Skroce knows of people in the business who draw four or five different books a month but he questions whether some artists who boast of doing multiple books a month are really putting out their best effort.

"I would love to do 10 titles. But, at the end of the day, I figure that if I'm not happy with what I've done, then it's not worth the paycheque. It's like making tires then."

What about following the example of McFarlane, who found

▲

critical and financial success with his creation, Spawn? Skroce just laughs.

"One day, I would like to be worth a hundred million dollars," he joked. "But all I really want is to be as good as I can and do as good a job as I can.

"Creating . . . That's what I want to do in one way or another."

A few years ago, Skroce observed, there was a comic book boom with the appearance on newsstands of lots of titles from lots of small independent companies plus spinoff lines from Marvel and D.C. But there was lots of speculation, with people investing in "comics futures" by buying up titles in job lots like stamps, hoarding comics, waiting for their value to increase on the collectors market.

Many companies trotted out gimmicks like hologram covers, free trading cards, and the like to sell titles rather than trying to find out what comics people were actually buying to read. In the end the industry and the fans suffered.

"A lot of them were basically lousy comics," Skroce said. "Hacked out at the last minute and not very good."

Speculators pulled out when they realized their investments weren't going to pay off like they'd hoped, some independents collapsed along with many of the new titles that the big companies had hyped out to join the trend. What remained behind were hordes of fans, angry and disappointed because they'd been stuck with lousy comics while many regular titles had suffered.

Skroce mused about the influence that video and cyber culture are now having on the comics genre.

"They (comics) have got a lot of competition these days. Video games and such. You can be a (virtual) superhero now, you don't have to just read about them."

"The only thing we can do now is do better work.

"I still love comics. We've come down from a big peak." Skroce noted that on-line comic strips now available on the Internet may become future competition to print comics. Accessing these new strips, though, may be the saving grace for print comics.

"There's still a different experience for a kid sitting at a monitor or sitting on the floor with a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich, reading your comic books."

☆

'Fury'ous

Stan 'the Man' talks about his affection for a certain spy

Stan Lee is famous as the man who revolutionized the art of story-telling in comics. During the early '60s when he was almost single-handedly scripted every issue of every comic that Marvel published, Lee wrote stories about heroes with feet of clay.

He's long since turned the writing reins over to other hands, equally talented if not as prolific, and occupied himself with overseeing Marvel Entertainment which looks after various superhero adaptations for the big and little screens. With the Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. movie-of-the-week project for FOX, Stan Lee attempted what few comic book personalities had done before. He got to act.

"Just two lines," Lee said, laughing, about his cameo appearance in the latest television project to feature one of his creations. Expect to see him pop up on a regular basis, though, in future Marvel film projects just like the way that Alfred Hitchcock and Stephen King show up in their movies.

"What we're trying out is to see that I have a little cameo in each movie. Except that the difference between me and Hitchcock is I'll have a few words to say."

I never thought of S.H.I.E.L.D. as a Bond-type of operation.

Nick Fury exploded onto the comics scene during the early '60s as the lead character in Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos, a war comic Lee created and scripted. Fury's first public appearance as a secret agent was in 1963 during a guest shot in Fantastic Four issue 21 in which he aided the superhero quartet in stopping the Hatemonger, a fascist revolutionary based in Latin America.

The stories in the Sgt. Fury comic were set during World War Two. At the time when he wrote the Hatemonger story, Lee had wanted to write some kind of a story in response to questions from readers about Fury's post-war adventures.

"I kept getting letters from readers saying 'those (Howlers) stories took place during World War Two. Is Fury still alive and what's he doing now?'"

During a conversation between Fury and Reed Richards a brief mention is made that the former commando is now working for the C.I.A. but Lee wasn't entirely satisfied with having Nick Fury as a "spook" for "the Company."

Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. replaced the Human Torch and the Thing series which had shared space in Strange Tales with Dr. Strange's sorcerous adventures. This was around the same time that The Man from U.N.C.L.E. series had become a hit on television.

"I thought, 'What if Nick Fury was the head of a secret organization like that?'" Lee was intrigued and excited by the potential of the S.H.I.E.L.D. series even more than his original war comic effort.

"I don't really like war stories all that much because I feel they glamorize war and I don't feel war should be glamorized." But, he added, that even when Marvel tried to cancel the Sgt. Fury comic—World War Two had to end sometime—readers' protests forced the company to restore the series, though it was just reprints of earlier stories with new covers. Sales, Lee noted bemusedly, remained excellent even for the reprint series.

Why a government agent role for Nick Fury? Why not just leave him in the army or

The television movie based on the Generation X comic book was one of the highlights of the television season — something that Lee hopes will hold true for the Nick Fury project.

have him go into some other occupation like private detective? First, Lee said, he wanted to write about Fury doing something other than fighting wars, be they international or border scraps. Second, he wanted Fury to continue to be a member of a larger team. There were too many loners in the hero comics, very few team comics.

"It had always been 'Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos' and I guess I'd always thought of him as the leader of a group."

At the time when Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. debuted on comic shelves, Sean Connery's early James Bond films were playing to packed audiences in movie theatres. It was the U.N.C.L.E. television series, though, which had the greatest influence on the development of S.H.I.E.L.D.

"I never thought of S.H.I.E.L.D. as a Bond-type of operation," Lee said. "It was (more) U.N.C.L.E. I used to watch that show every week." The similarities between U.N.C.L.E. and S.H.I.E.L.D. were mostly limited to both involving secret organizations.

"Other than that, we tried to do everything original and unique. We tried to make it (S.H.I.E.L.D.) much more wild than The Man from U.N.C.L.E." Part of that wildness included creating a horde of global organizations like Hydra and A.I.M. (Advanced Idea Mechanics) bent on world domination.

"Hydra was the first and my favorite," Lee said. He loved coming up with the ritual greetings, the chants, and the garish costumes. Other organizations like A.I.M. and the Secret Empire were interesting in their own ways, but Lee got the most fun out of writing stories which involved Hydra.

"I really enjoyed S.H.I.E.L.D.," Lee remarked, adding that he loved writing about Nick Fury, who he described as being a real John Wayne-type of character. Rough and tough but with a sensitive side that he kept secret even from himself.

"He was a good guy at heart but he would never admit that he was soft." Lee remarked that was the way he envisioned the character from the start when writing Sgt. Fury stories. While the Howlers may have been his friends, Fury had to make them fear him a little so they would become the best commandos possible, willing to take on any mission against the Nazis because the alternative was to face him. Lee remains proud that he was able to present the characters in a way that got all those different ideas across so that young readers were able to enjoy the comic yet their parents didn't find the characters offensive or too violent.

"I think I was able to make them sound like real tough, battle-hardened vets. There was nothing soft about them and yet I never used 'dirty' language."

Fury wasn't patterned after anyone that Lee himself knew. "No character I ever wrote was ever based on any one I ever knew." But the S.H.I.E.L.D. series itself was always intended to be a high-tech action series, rather than a traditional cloak-and-dagger spy series, so it would be able to fit smoothly in with Marvel's superhero books.

Given how much Lee enjoyed writing S.H.I.E.L.D. stories, how come Marvel's high-tech spy hero of the late '60s and early '70s never got his shot at film stardom until the late '90s? One of the factors, according to Lee, was finding someone who would believe that such a T.V. movie project would fly.

"It's not easy to sell things," Lee observed. "We had a good script. The script helped a lot." In the end, he said, everything comes down to timing.

"The time is certainly right now. Everybody is looking for the Big Movie, the Big Show, the Blockbuster."

Both Lee and Glover noted that some small changes had to be made to the original concept to make Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. relevant to viewers unfamiliar with the comic-book character. His war record, for instance. In the official Marvel universe, Nick Fury is a veteran of World War Two who also served during the Korean War before turning to espionage. In the movie version, Fury was still a veteran. Which war is never mentioned, though Glover thinks the Gulf War would be a good bet.

"You can't just make this for a comic (book) audience," he said. "You have to introduce themes that are more relevant to others." Likewise some of the S.H.I.E.L.D. continuity details readers are familiar with may be passed over in favor of helping the movie appeal to a wider audience.

"We didn't want it to be overloaded," Lee explained. He thinks it has worked out quite well in the end and that both S.H.I.E.L.D. fans and those who have never even heard of the comic should enjoy the finished result.

"When you think about it," Lee said, "there are as many trouble spots in the world now as there ever was, if not more." He cited civil wars like in the Balkans and Africa, countries ruled by drug cartels, and would-be Hitlers daring the rest of the world to stop them.

Whether there will be any sequels to Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., or even a possible series in the future, remains to be seen. Glover expects that, like Generation X, the modern spinoff of Lee's X-Men series, which also came to life on television on the streets of Vancouver, Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. will touch familiar chords in everyone.

"The X-Men is classic because it attacks prejudice in all forms," Glover said. "With Nick Fury it's closer to the bone of the struggle between Good and Evil. The character may be more unconventional but it's still the classic triumph of Good over Evil, Democracy versus Despotism."

Comic Shop Directory

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A story of a man and his dog

ECO-FUGITIVES

Story by
Nicholas de Kruyff
Art by
Stuart Immonen

If you're reading this you're probably a member of the human race, in which case you're fodder. Dead. Doomed to extinction. Sorry. I'm just trying to let everyone know.

At the time I write this, I am hiding in a luxurious resort in a Spanish-speaking South American city. (I think it's Spanish, I'm not sure. I've lost my phrase books.)

Accompanying me is my best friend and confident; Whitman, my Labrador retriever. For five months we've been running for our lives, our wake littered with hair-breadth escapes, failed attempts on our lives, and a host of angry waiters. More about the waiters later.

Who pursues us you ask? A despot Latin American ruler with an abundance of nostril hair? Religious zealots with little or no sense of humour? Greenpeace asking for a donation? Unfortunately not. Those at least we'd have a chance of escaping

Our advisory is far more . . . everything. She is the planet. Earth. Terra Firma. The Mother. The Big Blue Bitch as I have come to call her.

Why has she got it in for us? (And when I say 'us' I mean all of us, the whole race homo sapiens.) Let me tell.

***

A Slightly Overvalued Mansion, Garden District, Buffalo, New York.

Whitman the Lab sniffed the air, swishing it through his nostrils as a connoisseur wine tester swishes an unknown Beaujolais between cheeks. I lowered my copy of *Dilettante's Quarterly* and watched in amazement his noisy inhales. He lay on a silk Persian rug of swirling colours before the fireplace, his nose the colour of rich topsoil, his blonde fur reddened by the fire's light.

"I've had a Smelling," he announced.

"What is it?"

"We should eat," he said.

I looked at my watch.

"It's not supper time yet," I said.

"I've had a Smelling. We should eat. Now." He let out a small whimper.

Some things you cannot argue with — an empty stomach being one of them, Whitman's Smellings another. The dog's physic you see, can smell the future. I put down my magazine and marched into the kitchen, Whitman dogging my heels. Into his bowl I emptied a can of premium dog food, all natural, prepared by Swiss monks. He looked dejectedly at the mash then raised his eyes to me.

"Not that," he said ruefully. "Sausages. Please."

"You can't seriously expect me to buy this, Whitman."

"I Smelt sausages. It really should be sausages."

His mud-brown eyes moistened to a delicate sheen. They could soften the heart of a South Carolina Highway Patrolman with a half-written ticket. Yielding to this onslaught of cuteness, I reached into the freezer and took out a package of bratwurst, popped them into the microwave and set it to defrost.

"After we eat we should go," he said.

I looked at him incredulously.

"Go? Go where?"

"To the cottage."

"What on earth for?"

"Get out of the city."

"But I love Buffalo. It's so urban without all the mess."

"Pollution," he said cryptically.

"What about it?"

"It's bad."

"I know."

"It will kill you."

"Kill who?"

"All of you. All humans."

Then, in a low voice he added, "The average sperm count in human males has declined by 50 per cent over the last half-century."

What the hell is going on? I thought.

❑❑❑

The first time Whitman had a Smelling was scant days after I rescued him from the humane society. I was laying fresh newspaper in the kitchen when he trotted up to me, tail wagging, sniffed the air, and said: "Go buy me a toy."

"What did you say?"

The little bugger said nothing.

"If I go buy you a toy, will you say it again."

He nodded to this.

At Playful Pooches Pet store I selected a squeezy carrot that squeaked. (I thought it would have better play value than the latex rolled-up newspaper or the cowhide dingle-dangle or the simonized woofer pull-ring.) While she ran my Gold Visa through the machine, I confided to the owner, a tall blonde with sparkling jade eyes and mischievous smile, that my Labrador puppy had personally requested the toy.

We ended up dating for eight months.

Her name was Sheila.

When I got home I told Whitman I'd met a beautiful, spirited girl, and we were going out later that night. He said he already knew, he had Smelt it, and could he please have his squeaky carrot.

Whitman's Smellings continued, albeit irregularly. I pressured him to be more literal, less Oracle-at-Delphish, but he either would not or could not comply. For instance there was the time when he divined: "You shouldn't go for seafood tonight. Eat Italian . . . and bring me home some bruschetta."

Naturally, I asked him why. He said nothing. I ignored his warning and went ahead with my plans *de poisson*.

Big mistake. At the restaurant, Sheila, the pet store owner — angry over a comment I made regarding the faint odor of Alpo which constantly hung about her — poured an entire bowl of cocktail shrimp over my head.

Not content with the pitch of my scream, she proceeded to the lobster tank, plucked out a two-and-a-half pound Atlantic Red and shoved it down my pants, having first removed its claw restraints.

After compensating the restaurant for damage, we detoured quickly to an emergency ward, then went back to her place for the best sex we'd ever had.

Looking back I think Whitman was right. We should've eaten Italian. That way I could have avoided the claw lacerations.

☆ ☆ ☆

A Cottage on one of the Thousand Islands, Upstate New York.

When Mr. Lee's Dry Cleaning delivered my laundry by water taxi, I snapped. Flipped. Lost it.

As the taxi's Evinrude skimmed away I stalked off in search of Whitman, double starched shirts gripped under my arm. Time for a *tête-à-tête* with man's best.

"Whitman! Come!"

He cantered out from behind the woodpile, flecks of bark hanging from his snout. Sensing my displeasure he sat promptly.

"All right, I don't want to guess, so just tell me why you phoned Mr. Lee's and told them to give all my thong underwear to Goodwill."

His eyes slipped away from mine.

"The looser ones are better. Not as constricting, allowing support without squishing or overheating."

When I got home I told Whitman I'd met a beautiful, spirited girl, and we were going out later that night. He said he already knew, he had Smelt it, and could he please have his squeaky carrot.

"Since when did you become ombudsmen for my genitals?"

He said nothing. I grabbed his collar.

"I've had enough! What is going on? All this odd behaviour — demanding sausages, insisting on sojourns in the country, giving away my Playboy mesh underwear — explain!"

"Me frightened? Of what?"

"I've been mixing testosterone in with your sausages."

My eyebrows ached they shot up so fast.

"Why?"

Suddenly he stiffened, looked over my shoulder, and growled. I turned and found myself wishing I hadn't.

A swarm hovered before me. Hornets, honey bees, mud wasps, yellow jackets. Dangerous motes bobbing in the breeze. The swarm wafted closer, its choral hum lulling me.

"Water! Get in the water!" Whitman barked.

I sprinted away, hurdling rocks and fast-stepping through rocky undergrowth. The swarm buzzed angrily behind. Whitman easily outdistanced me and was dog-paddling by the time my soft-soled oxfords hit the dock. A few strides, a jump, and I was chest-high in the cold of the St. Lawrence.

That's where the Muskie was waiting.

The muskellunge; tenacious and bold. Thin and long, like it's cousin the pike, with jaws like a duck's bill packed with rows of curving white teeth.

An olive blur beneath the water struck my shin. Pain ripped into my mind. My hands flashed down, grabbed the slippery body that had anchored itself to my leg. Instead of pulling at it, I squeezed. The muskie didn't like that. It released my leg and bent itself nearly in two to snap at the hands encircling it. I jerked my hands away. It vanished into the murk of the river.

Quickly I assess the situation: bad, going on catastrophic.

Whitman paddled circles beside me. The swarm had reached the beach; its sound was angry, loud, a million gossamer wings beating the air in rhythm out over the water. The swarm bared down at us, thick as arrows at Agincourt.

"Whitman, what should we do?!"

"Splash."

"What?"

"Splash them with water."

Of course! Cupping my hands into a fan I heaved along the surface of the St. Lawrence.

Water fanned up in a sheet, eating into the oncoming swarm. The cloud of stinging insects fell apart like thrown confetti, stragglers flitting away towards the safety of the trees, the unlucky writhing on top of the water.

"Out of the water. Quick, before the damn fish returns."

Once ashore, dripping, bleeding, exhausted, and smelling of algae, I turned to Whitman.

"Don't you think you had better tell me what is going on?"

☆ ☆ ☆

In a bright red phone booth across the street from Big Bill, London.

"Hello."

"Collect call from Norman in the UK. Will you accept the charges?"

. . . sorry, Ben, Big Ben, London.

"Will you accept the charges from Norman, miss?"

"Norman who?"

"Come on, Sheila. It's me, Norman."

"Sir, please, do not speak until I have confirmation the charges will be accepted."

"Sheila, accept them for Christsakes, this is important!"

"Sir! What did I just . . ."

"BUT THIS IS IMPORTANT!"

"DON'T YELL AT ME, I'm a tele-

phone employee!"

"It's alright, operator. I'll accept the charges."

"Thank-you. You may go ahead, *sir.*"

"Norman?"

"Sheila, I'm in a mess and need to talk and . . . Why are you groaning?"

"I can't believe this. And I'm paying for this self-flagellation. You need to talk to me? I left you because you never talked to me."

"I . . . tried."

"Quite the elocutionist, aren't you? I've tried to get in contact with my feeling since you left and I don't think I have room for you back in my life now."

"Please Sheila. This is important. I'm being stalked."

"By who?"

"It's hard to explain."

"Bye Norman."

"Alright, alright . . ."

"Well?"

"You're going to think I'm crazy."

"I already think you're crazy."

"The Earth is trying to assassinate me."

"You're crazy."

"Wait. Hear me out, all right? Don't make any snap decisions. Sheila. Please?"

"You've got one minute."

"Okay, over the last half-century the average sperm count in human males has declined 50 per cent. Illness affecting male genitalia has increased; cancer of the testicles, testicles failing to drop before birth, etc. Know why?"

"Poetic justice."

"No. It's our environment. The Earth. The Earth can think and it is trying to sterilize us. The Gaia Theory, you know?"

"Yes, I know."

"All right. Anyway, the big blue bitch is trying to exterminate humans because we've been poisoning her."

"By targeting male genitalia? Shere Hite is going to love this."

"It's changing our pollution into sperm inhibitors and carcinogens and . . . do you hear fluttering on the line?"

"Norman, what made you believe this?"

"My dog told me. He's been lacing my food with testosterone to keep my male hormone levels up."

"Your dog told you?"

"He can smell the future. He has prescient Smellings, like visions, only the future is smelt, not seen. That's why I'm in England. He Smelled fish and chips wrapped in newspaper, so we came here."

"Norman, I thought you were whacked before, but you're really out there now."

"Sheila, please. I know how this must sound . . . where the hell is that fluttering coming from . . ."

"Norman . . ."

"Oh Christ, pigeons! Bloody pigeons! I gotta agggghhh . . ."

"Norman? Norman?"

☆ ☆ ☆

A quaint, but woefully Spartan farmhouse outside Aachen, Germany.

"Sheila, you didn't have to come all this way."

"After your phone call I got worried. What happened?"

"A horde of pigeons descended on me from Nelson's column. Horrific, I can tell you; all those wings flapping and beaks pecking and . . . well, you can imagine. I managed to survive by remaining perfectly still. They thought I was just another statue and eventually where lured away by tourists throwing seed. How did you find me?"

I sipped scotch and enjoyed the warm burn down my throat. It seemed ages since I had last sat down on a couple of forty-pound bags of puppy chow and kibitzed with Sheila. I'd missed it.

"I called her. Another Smelling I had."

"Oh good. Sheila, you remember my Lab, Whitman."

"Hello."

"Norman . . . your dog talks."

"I told you he could talk."

"I thought you were joking."

"No, I wasn't, I was serious — ahh . . . hello? . . . Sheila? . . . Are you fooling? . . . Yoo-hoo, I can see up your nose. . . Norman, she's fainted. Help me bring her round."

"What ever you say. You're the human."

☆ ☆ ☆

Sheila sat on the couch and I recounted the bizarre happenings of the last few months. It was early evening by the time I had her briefed.

"Okay, I get what your saying," she said, reclining on the couch, a bottle of single malt scotch in one hand and a bottle of single malt scotch in the other. Nearby, Whitman snoozed on a rug in front of the sputtering fire.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

I pried the Glenfiddich out of her hand and poured myself three fingers.

"I'm going public, start an advertising campaign, tell my story to the world. A couple of commercial slots during the Super Bowl and everyone should know Earth has awakened and she's pissed."

I sipped scotch and enjoyed the warm burn down my throat. It seemed ages since I had last sat down on a couple of forty-pound bags of puppy chow and kibitzed with Sheila. I'd missed it.

"What I don't understand is why me? I've never been antagonistic toward the Earth."

"But don't you see? It's not just you," Sheila said putting down the other bottle and pointing to Whitman.

"It's Whitman and you together. Whitman has his superior intelligence, communication skills and prescience, and you . . . have your fortune."

Whitman's head popped up suddenly, eyes alert, nostrils sampling the air.

"I'm Smelling . . . danger."

I ran to the door and opened it a crack. Peering out into the black night of the German countryside there was nothing, just a lot of very stiff trees.

"I don't see anything."

"Norman."

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"Yes?"

"It's her. I'm Smelling betrayal on her."

By the time I'd turned Sheila was pointing the cold eye of a S&W .44 at my chest. A ridge of hair stood up on Whitman's neck. Growling low in his throat, he slunk forward. She swung the pistol at him. Whitman stopped.

"Careful," He said. "She's turned on you."

"Why Sheila?" I asked.

"I wasn't going to do it this way. I was going to wait till you both were asleep, a cigarette left smoldering on the couch all night doesn't even need to flame, the embers alone can produce enough carbon dioxide to kill. Just another careless smoking incident. Now it seems you're going to have be a hunting accident. Okay, both of you, outside, now!"

I needed time. Or a plan. Or both.

Luckily, I had Whitman.

He hung his head in a reproachful manner and said gravely, "You really shouldn't be doing this."

She stared at him, her lip curling into a sneer. "Shut up and get outside."

"Bad manners," Whitman pointed out, and tapped his paw on the floorboards.

She never saw it coming.

Four 40 kilo bags of Science Diet fell through the ceiling onto Sheila, one directly on her head. She collapsed. The bags broke. Kibble exploded outwards. It was like a vertical hail storm, a cloud of nuggets pelting us, a tide of dry dog food. By the time the last piece had stopped skipping across the floor, Sheila lay groaning beneath a pile of brown crunchy pellets, her gunless hand absently scratching the air.

Whitman's head lolled around to stare at me. "She's bagged." I could have sworn his chops curved into slightest suggestion of a smile.

"How did you do that?"

"Counterweighted. I Smelled this days before."

"You could have told me."

"Nope. If I had told you it might not have happened this way. Every Smell has to be smelt."

"Too true."

"I wasn't going to do it this way. I was going to wait till you both were asleep, a cigarette left smoldering on the couch all night doesn't even need to flame, the embers alone can produce enough carbon dioxide to kill.

Searching her pockets, I discovered a couple of pamphlets detailing the illegal trade in North American Black Bear gall bladders, and another urging me to become a "Guardian of the Rainforest" today.

"Eco-terrorist," I said.

"Yep. Unmistakable. Smell of campfires and unwashed hair and residue fervor. Too much chaining themselves to oil tankers. We should go before she comes around."

So we did.

☆ ☆ ☆

I'm not inclined to tell.

That was last fall.

Since then we have become fugitives from nature, sequestering ourselves in cities, wearing only synthetics, eating nothing but Cheez Whiz and McDonald's. Assassination attempts have followed us everywhere, each one closer than the last. Perhaps you read about the unfortunate "mass hamster jump" in Times Square not too long ago. That was meant for me.

Whitman's psychic Smellings have saved us time and again. I follow his lead, never quite sure what city we're in or what language is being spoken. (In some Mediterranean country last month I'd thought all the waiters had gone insane, until Whitman discovered I'd been using the wrong phrase book. Instead of ordering a garden salad, I'd been asking them to squat on the floor and act like crustaceans.)

So here I am trying to warn you.

You might be shaking your head thinking this is just a fantasy produced by an alcohol-fueled imagination, or a desperate cry for attention, or just pulp fiction. But before you close your mind totally and throw away the key, do me a favor; go and look at your pet — if you don't have one, call up a friend who does, or try making friends with the neighbourhood squirrels — bend down close to the animal's face, and looking into their eyes, ask, "Would you like sausages for dinner?"

I rest my case.

☆

What sacrifices would you be willing to make?

SKYWRITER

Story by
Janine Cross

"I deserve better than this," David muttered.

He shrugged deeper into his wool-lined jacket and averted his eyes from the armed police and snarling dogs clearing the protestors away from the docked sea-shuttle. Despite the cold November rain and the efforts of the police, the protesters continued to hurl threats at both David and the rest of the Grenadine employees waiting to leave the island.

"Kredge kills unborn babies!"

"Skywriting is murder!"

The roar of an engine drowned out the chaos; from behind the Grenadine factories, a black seaplane lifted into the sky. It banked into a red and blue cloud of dissolving kredge, then disappeared into fog.

David's lawyer shifted beneath his umbrella. "You'll travel home on one of those if you sign that contract, Dave. Hell, you could own one."

David sucked in the seaweed smell of the Pacific ocean through flared nostrils and continued to stare after the plane. A fierce yearning ripped through him.

All I need to do is sign the contract. His eyes travelled to the cloud of dissolving kredge.

What two days before had been an advertisement for fitness equipment was now little more than watery lines, the wash of coloured kredge muddied like the paintbox of a child. A hundred feet or so above the waves, the streaks lost all colour as the kredge dissolved.

"You have to give Grenadine an answer by tomorrow," his lawyer pressed. "I can't hold off the other skywriters fighting to get this contract."

"Just give me three more days."

"I can't—"

"Hold them off until Monday." David looked away from the sky and faced his lawyer. "I need the weekend to convince Xyla."

"Is her consent necessary?"

"She's my wife. What do you think?"

The lawyer pursed his lips; David gritted his teeth.

Nine years of overtime and freelance hustling, nine years of grovelling to Grenadine executives, and now the only thing preventing him from attaining prestige and security was his wife. At the end of the dock, the police finally cleared the protesters away from the shuttle. The Grenadine employees shuffled forward, David with them.

The metal ramp of the shuttle rang under his feet as he boarded, crushed amongst those heading toward North Vancouver. He said a curt goodbye to his lawyer and ducked into the warm interior, escaping the protestors and the icy wind with relief. The shuttle burst away from Grenadine Island.

He sank into a hard plastic chair and massaged his numb hands. Thank God he'd be far away from this infernal rain tomorrow, experiencing South American sunshine with Xyla, in the virtual body of Hernan Cortes. Hopefully the simulated sunshine would soften her resistance to the contract.

The shuttle docked in North Vancouver, an hour late because of the protestors at Grenadine. David missed his tram connection and had to walk from the terminal to his house.

Wet, cold, and annoyed, he waited impatiently for the face-screen of his home computer to recognize him and release the lock. From under the door, he thought he could detect the glue-like, plastic odour of Xyla's sculpting glucin; that meant she hadn't turned on the circulation vents in her art studio. Again.

He grimaced and entered.

"You're late," she said, even before he'd reached the kitchen. "Another protest?"

He mumbled something appropriate, glanced at the table, and tensed: there were candles on it. That meant she wanted to try again tonight. Why did she persist in wanting children?

He sat at the table and decided he'd tell her about the contract after dinner.

They ate in silence, the rain against the gutters and the clink of cutlery the only noise.

Mid-supper, he forced himself to break the silence. "How's the mobile?"

"Hmm?" She started and looked up from her wine glass.

"The mobile?" he repeated. "The dolphin?"

An expression flitted across her face; he couldn't define it but knew he'd somehow blundered.

"I sold it last week. Remember? We discussed it."

"Of course." He searched his mind, picturing her studio down-

stairs. "I meant the manatee. That's your present project, isn't it?"

"Yes. Want to see it?" Her question had the taste of a challenge.

"I'd love to."

He picked up his wine and followed her down to the cool studio, grimacing at the synthetic odour of warm glucin. The smell had once aroused him, provoking situations where Xyla finished sweat-slicked and naked on the studio floor. But now the stench just made him ill and passion was a colourless memory.

If only Xyla would agree to his promotion, maybe those passions could be rekindled . . .

She dispelled the gloom of the studio with a flick of a switch, illuminating the partially formed body of a manatee. The sculpture undulated from a canvas covered floor, surrounded by sculpting burrs and knives. Although the manatee was stationary, the glucin it was composed of rippled, creating an illusion of motion.

"Looks good, looks good," he murmured, head bobbing up and down like a woodpecker toy.

They both stood in silence and regarded the half-formed sculpture.

"Xyla—" he began, but at the exact same moment that she started speaking.

"Go ahead, go ahead," she said, moving away from him and picking up instruments from the floor. "You first."

"No, you say what you have to say."

"After months of hardly speaking to each other, why do we have to argue over who should speak first?"

"I'm not arguing," he said.

"Sorry. Poor word choice."

He drained his wine glass and carefully set it on a stained workbench. "What was it you wanted to tell me, Xyla?"

Her eyes drifted from his, and she rolled a paint tube slowly between her two palms. "This weekend. The trip. I won't be going."

"What?"

"I won't be joining you." As an afterthought she added, "Sorry."

"That's all you can say? Sorry?"

She studied the tube in her hands. "I don't enjoy it much and I have an appointment—"

"You don't enjoy it?"

"Please don't raise your voice at me."

"Xyla, we've been riding Cortes once a month for almost a year, and now you tell me you've never enjoyed it?"

"I don't want to argue with you."

"I'm not arguing, I'm just trying to understand you."

She placed the paint tube onto a bench, met his eyes, and sucked in a breath.

"I never wanted to purchase that time-share in the first place, David. I've always despised Cortes."

"Despised him? He's a legendary explorer!"

"He's a monster! We've experienced some of the obscenities he's committed and I can't stomach it anymore."

"Obscenities? What the hell are you talking about?"

"Those dogs," she spat the word. "He fed those war dogs Indian flesh, to create an instinct in them to kill the natives."

"He had to protect his men. He had his reasons."

"No!" Her voice echoed around the studio and she flushed. "They're excuses David, not reasons. He committed those crimes under the guise of protecting his men, as if that would absolve him of all wrong. But it doesn't! The ends don't justify the means, just like Grenadine."

"Christ, not this again."

"David, if only I could make you see—"

"Don't make me your religious cause, Xyla! I'm sick of it!"

She stamped a foot. "I'm not making you into a religious cause, damn it! I'm just trying to dig out the morals and ethics that used to exist in the David Moore I married nine years ago!"

"I haven't changed, Xyla. I'm the same."

"No. The David Moore I married was an artist, a compassionate, dedicated artist."

"Who wanted to be a skywriter. You knew that when we married."

"But take a look around you, David! The skies are clogged with Grenadine's advertising trash; everything is smeared with kredge."

He swallowed his anger and tried a professional tone. "It's not kredge, Xyla, it's the dissolved remains of it. It's translucent and absolutely harmless. And you know as well as I do that we can only write in designated areas; the sky is hardly clogged."

She spread her hands before her, as if beseeching him to agree with her. "I've had three miscarriages, David. Three of them."

"It's not the kredge."

"How do you know?"

He closed his eyes and wondered — briefly — if she was worth this.

"Kredge is just micro-beads of dye," he said in a clipped tone.

"It's magnetized."

His eyes snapped open. "The magnetic pull between the beads is weak. That's why we have to rewrite every second day. There is no way it causes miscarriages."

"But more women are having them, and babies are dying—"

"Christ Xyla! That's only on the islands that surround Grenadine! Those hippies don't eat right, and they don't vaccinate their kids . . ." He choked on his own words and balled his hands into fists.

"Believe what you want to about the islanders, but what about me? And what about the sky itself?" She gestured angrily to the ceiling. "Aren't you sick of filling it each day with advertising crap? Don't you have any pride?"

He cursed and turned away from her.

Eventually, when he trusted himself to speak rationally, he turned back to her.

"Today Grenadine offered me a permanent contract," he said hoarsely. "That means a steady income, Xyla. No more freelancing."

"So what?" she whispered. "You'll still be spewing kredge into the air."

They stared at each other, a vat of glucin between them.

"Do the right thing, David. Don't accept it."

The wine churned inside his gut. He felt the need to vomit, to purify himself.

"I'm going to the time-share centre tomorrow," he said. "I'd like you to come; I think the vacation will do us both good."

She shook her head, that unfathomable expression upon her face again. "You don't get it. Go without me, David. I've got work to do."

She turned her back on him and started prying the lid off a pigment can; she was going to work through the night. He'd be sleeping alone again.

Relief smothered any sorrow he may have felt.

North Vancouver's Cryogenic Time-Share Travel Centre:

David read the words and felt the familiar thrill of anticipation as he walked between the pillars supporting the Grecian-style building. The inside of the centre as he tubed down to floor seven was also comfortably familiar with it's replica artifacts from bygone eras and the three dimensional videos of available time-share celebrities. Everything exuded an air of gaiety. The travellers tubing alongside him bubbled with expectation.

As the pert warder guided him toward his casket, he thought of Xyla, asleep in her studio tent. She'd worked the night through, the shape of the manatee a testament to that.

He shoved all thoughts of her away as he handed the warder his health disc, pile of folded clothes, and shoes.

"Just a weekend, is that correct?" the warder chirped. She placed his clothes and shoes in the overhead compartment, plugged in his disc, and scanned the data. "One virtual ride, no interactivity; a nice, cost-efficient choice."

But if I accept the contract, he thought, half-listening to her babble, I could afford full virtual reality interaction — no more passive trips.

"It's too bad your wife won't be joining you, Mr. Moore; I cancelled her casket as per her modifications. I guess it's just you, me, and Cortes."

She beamed at him beneath a halo of amber hair, the yellow of her sterile skin sheath accenting the golden highlights. "If you wish to renew your time-share on Hernan Cortes, please visit the registration desk when you revive. Any questions? No, of course not, you're an old hand at this. Bon voyage!"

The casket closed, and through the translucent glass he could see her bosom press against the lid as she adjusted the mist dials. The hiss of marithane gas filled the casket, the pungent smell evoking memories of butter melting on warm, soft bread . . .

He started to drift, the brisk efficiency of the warder assuring him that he would be hooked into the sensory stimuli only when he was completely Out.

Soft, warm, bread . . .

He lazily felt an erection starting beneath his groin towel. Then he fell Out.

And In.

He was immediately assaulted by the tension pulsating through him/Cortes, and he marvelled at the skill of the framer who'd created this day. But his artistic appreciation rapidly became overwhelmed by more immediate sensations.

He swallowed, throat dry. Sweltering under a dirt and sweat soaked uniform, his iron helmet a sultry cage, he gripped a heavy sword in his right hand. The horse beneath him balked, tossing its head, chomping at the bit. Foam fell from its mouth and was trampled by dusty hooves. David/Cortes tightened his one-handed grip on the reins and looked around.

Before him, his mounted squadron likewise struggled to control their snorting, sweating horses. In front of the horses marched his men, their iron swords drawn and flashing in the sun, the smell of their wood and leather shoulder shields mingling with their body sweat. The huge, panting war dogs criss-crossed in front of them, noses to the ground, snarling at each other.

They were advancing along the Iztapalapa causeway. Throngs of people arriving to or departing from this great Aztec city gawked at them with a mixture of awe, anger, and unease.

David/Cortes stood up in his saddle, aching legs protesting, and narrowed his eyes at the five-mile length of the stone causeway leading toward the city centre. Ahead, stone buildings and great pyramids rose from the midst of sapphire lakes.

He rode to claim the city as his own.

Indians were rowing canoes from all parts of the lake to come and see his arrival. He sat down in his saddle, upper lip curling with satisfaction.

And then, after the massacre, Cortes himself had dressed his own wounds with the fat from a slain Indian.

That imbecile king Moctezuma will regret sending those useless gifts of bird feathers.

One of the four mounted scouts came galloping down the sweating line, causing his men's heads to turn in nervous anticipation. Cortes shouted at those nearest him to keep moving, to stay alert against ambush. A merchant carrying a huge basket of oranges upon his back scrambled out of the way of the scout.

The horse skittered and danced, nostrils flared, eyes circled with white.

"Any sign of ambush?"

"There is a multitude of people everywhere, my lord, crowding the streets, crammed upon the roof-tops, far more than you see here choking the waterways. Though restless, they do not appear threatening."

"Keep me informed."

The scout saluted, whirled his horse, and galloped back to the fore of the line.

Cortes blinked sweat and grit out of his eyes and felt a sudden anger toward the Indians staring at him.

"Dare you think *us* the foreign savages," he muttered. "I am to be your king."

With the thought came a flash of memory: the terror when Malintzin hissed in Cortes' ear that the Cholulans did not regard Cortes as their god Quetzalcoatl, but instead as a barbarian.

"They plan to eat you," his native guide had whispered. "They plan to devour you. Those pots you see brimming with peppers and tomatoes, they wait to boil your flesh."

Simulated memories suddenly flooded David's senses: Spanish swords slashing down those who held no swords or shields, gutting those who fled in confused terror, striking those whose only provocation had been to prepare huge pots of food for their strange guests.

And then, after the massacre, Cortes himself had dressed his own wounds with the fat from a slain Indian.

Heart thudding, vision blurring, David wildly wondered who in the name of hell had been the framer for this segment. He fell out.

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"Mr. Moore? Open your eyes. That's right. No, don't sit yet. Here, sip this."

The yellow blur continued to press the salty liquid against his lips.

"There you go. Roll to your left side, slowly now. I'm going to give you a tiny prick in your bottom . . ."

"Ouch! Jesus Christ!"

"I'm going to shut you in while I locate the superintendent. You'll be fine." The efficient hands pulled his groin towel back into place.

The casket lid closed down on top of him with a hollow thunk.

David stared at the translucent glass above him and licked his salt-coated lips. By the time the superintendent arrived and re-opened his casket, David felt cognizant again.

"Heard you had a minor reaction, Mr. Moore." The superintendent reeked of stale tobacco as he looked over his paunch down into David's casket. "We'll tube you over to medical and examine you. First, I'll just check your vitals."

Stout fingers wielded a bright pencil light into his eyes.

"Good, good," the superintendent murmured as David flinched from the glare. "You've never had a reaction before, have you?"

"No," he replied, voice husky. "Never."

"Hold out your arm." He puffed out his oily cheeks and checked the pressure patch on David's left bicep. "Good. Can you sit up for me? Take my hand."

Carefully, expecting a rush of nausea, David grasped the man's arm and slowly sat upright. He released his breath in relief as no dizziness occurred.

"Good. Let's slowly help you out."

With the warder on one side and the

superintendent on the other, David was gently hauled out of his casket and lowered into a wheelchair. The warder draped a thin blanket around him.

"I don't understand," David rasped. "Why the reaction?"

"Your warder says your wife requested a trip modification. I had a look at the itinerary and the framer; it's a drastic change from what you're used to. Stick to your regular framer from now on. His portrayals are more temperate."

He clapped David on the shoulder, murmured to the warder, and lumbered down the aisle.

"Alright Mr. Moore," the warder chirped. "I'll just set you on your way."

She emptied his overhead compartment, stuffing his clothes into a rubber satchel behind the wheelchair. The chair whirred as she programmed it to follow the chemical trail to the medical unit.

"The seat belt will unlock at your destination." She came around to his side and beamed. "Ready? Bon voyage!"

He hated her, intensely, as the wheelchair rolled down the corridor, its nose snuffling along the floor's imbedded chemical tracks.

It sniffed, nose intent on the smells, like the slavering, anxious war dogs fed on Indian flesh . . .

"Trip modification?" he muttered angrily.

He writhed, straining to look over his shoulder, the mesh-metal harness digging into his chest. "You said my wife requested a modification; I thought she only cancelled her casket."

Behind him, the warder shook her head.

"No, sir; your wife went to a great deal of trouble selecting a new framer for you. She said you wanted something with more 'zing', so I recommended framer 241."

Her white teeth shined at him, disappearing as the wheelchair doggedly followed its programmed path around a bend.

The subsequent visit at the medical bay was brief, intense, and humiliating. David stalked to the nearest tube, stopped at the reservation floor, and confronted the first available travel agent.

"Who's framer 241?" he demanded.

"Richard, Hugh Richard," the agent said. "Brilliant framer. Would you care to watch a video on some of his available celebrities? Please, sit down."

"How accurate is he?"

"Sir?" The agent's smile became fixed beneath his eagle-sculpted beard.

David clenched the arms of his chair and leaned toward the agent's desk. "Historical accuracy. That's what I'm concerned with."

"All our framers are accurate."

"Look, I've been riding Hernan Cortes for eight months and I've enjoyed every minute of it."

War dogs fed on the flesh of Indians.

"Almost," he modified, angry that he need concede anything to this stranger. He shifted in the heated chair. "Today I rode Cortes by this Hugh Richard. His interpretation differs immensely from my regular framer."

The travel agent lifted his hands away from his data turntable and gently patted his beard.

He writhed, straining to look over his shoulder, the mesh-metal harness digging into his chest.

"Hugh Richard is famous for both his accuracy and his emotional portrayal of certain celebrities. All of his work passes the board of examiners, though. We're stringent about that."

David swallowed. "So he *is* accurate?"

"Our researchers assert — and all of them are from Harvard — that yes, he is accurate. Some people would say Hugh Richard is *painfully* accurate."

David launched himself from his chair and left the travel centre.

He walked home, brooding.

He knew the comparison Xyla was trying to draw for him, sculpt for him like a glucin model. In her sculpture, Grenadine was like Hugh Richard's Cortes, self-serving, corrupt, greedy. Kredge was like the massacres, pitiless, staining the earth with senseless waste.

And he, David? What was he like?

Those war dogs, fed on the flesh of others, hungering for more.

Outrageous drama.

Skywriting was his dream. Damn it, he was one of the best, not like some of those savages out there. The work he'd done for the National Parks Board two summers ago had received praise from the toughest Vancouver critics, despite the protests three days later about the dissolved kredge coating the harbour.

He reached home in half the time it usually took him, stormed into his house, and fumbled for the light dial.

"Xyla?"

He frowned and shivered in the cold.

"Xyla?"

She'd left him.

He stood in the hall, staring at the creeper vine growing over the archway to the living room, feeling that she'd cheated him of a decision.

Someone moved downstairs; he stiffened.

"Xyla?"

Carefully, he pushed open the studio door. Strange shadows flickered at the bottom of the stairs. For a moment, he envisioned her waiting for him, lurking in the pools of dark, a sculpting knife in her hand.

Candle light and the sound of her breathing — he sucked in a breath and briefly closed his eyes. He tried to inject sternness into his voice; the brief vision had snatched away his anger.

"I didn't appreciate the trip modification, Xyla."

His voice echoed around the studio beneath him. He waited for a response. When he didn't receive one, he descended.

She was sitting on the floor, an empty bottle of wine beside her. Her left hand stroked the writhing glucin manatee.

"There are always two sides to a coin. Did you see the other side, David?"

Her voice was wine-mushy. He frowned.

"Well? Did you?"

"You can't compare Grenadine to Cortes," he said.

"I can and did." Her hand stopped, fell to her side. "Come sit beside me, David. I have something to tell you. I'll tell you why I didn't come on the trip today."

Anticipation pricked his skin. He awkwardly sat beside her. "Why aren't the lights on?"

She turned a pallid, tear-swollen face toward him. He jerked, startled, and knew he should reach out and hold her.

But found he couldn't.

She licked her lips and her eyes slid away from his face. "I went for another series of tests today. I saw a different specialist, a young woman with a lisp. I can't remember her name, something Polish or Hungarian. She's fairly certain she knows the cause of my miscarriages."

Like an elastic band stretched too far, something inside David snapped. Relief flooded through him.

"It's the kredge. I'm sorry, Xyla."

"David—"

"Look, we both haven't been happy for awhile, and if the kredge is stopping you from having what you want, then perhaps

it'd be best if we paid the divorce fine and filed for separation."

She looked back at him, eyes slowly widening, and he was suddenly able to reach out and hold her, now that she was no longer his.

He pulled her close, shut his eyes, and buried his face in her hair. She smelled warm, familiar. A sliver of sorrow laced the freedom he felt. "I'm sorry, Xyla."

She pushed at him, gentle but insistent. He released her.

That strange look was on her face again.

"No, David, that's not what I was going to say. It's not the kredge. It's the glucin."

"The . . . glucin?"

She sucked in a deep breath and nodded at the manatee flickering in the candle light.

"The glucin. That's what's causing the miscarriages. If I want to conceive, I have to avoid glucin for at least two years."

"You don't want to do that," he said quickly. "Do you?"

"No, but I could be implanted with another woman's ova. The doctor said—"

"We couldn't afford it."

"Then we could adopt—"

"I don't want someone else's child, Xyla."

Pain crossed her face, replaced with resignation. She looked away from him. "Perhaps I don't need to have children, then. But we could still get counselling. Try fix the marriage."

He hesitated for a dizzy second and thought of a black sea-plane lifting into the sky.

Thought of Cortes.

"We don't have time for that, Xyla. Our careers won't permit it."

"I see," she said quietly, looking back at him. "You've decided on divorce, then."

"I'm a skywriter; you can't accept it and I'm not going to give it up. Just like you won't give up your art. Some things have to be sacrificed to achieve what a person wants."

"Is that what Cortes believed?" she asked bitterly.

"Of course: he was a conquistador."

"Like you."

He didn't pause. "Like me."

Yes, he *was* a conquistador. He would accept that contract tomorrow and eventually own a sleek, black seaplane.

He would snap his jaws at those in his way.

He was a conquistador.

The entire sky awaited him, and he would be its king.

☆

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Sometimes being a man is emotional hell

VALKYRIES

when reproductive practises go slightly awry

Story by
Natalie K. Björklund
Art by
Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

"She's over there, Peter," the neuter said when Tomalin arrived. He made a dismissive gesture from the doorway of the big garage toward the white space ship on the tarmac.

Tomalin ignored the epithet as he had been trained to do. He had been warned that the epithets would start as soon as the effects of the newly released testosterone in his body became physically apparent. Neuters in particular loved to throw them around. It was one of the prices you paid for serving the Matriarchy.

Probably the newly sprouting facial hair had given him away. Maybe it had been the unexpected breaking and deepening of his voice mid sentence. Cracking was normal and would pass with the mood swings once fertility had been fully restored. He would learn to live with the harsh masculine voice the hormones brought.

Tomalin approached the scarred and decrepit looking space fighter barely hiding his trepidation. He put his two suitcases down together and stepped forward.

Twenty-one children were the number the geneticists had determined that he should produce. It was a high number but then his was an unusual genetic compliment. After that, the raging of the hormones would end for him and he could return to the comfort of neutered state, this time permanently. He recited the phrases of comfort to himself as he approached the craft.

"Iridium!" he heard a feminine voice shout. "I need the phase inducer for this engine. The coil is out of alignment again, damn it."

Iridium. Tomalin knew she had named each of her twelve children after one of the elements. It was a fad among the women of his mother's generation. Many named their children in sets of things. He had gone to school with twin boys named Basil and Oregano. He wondered what she

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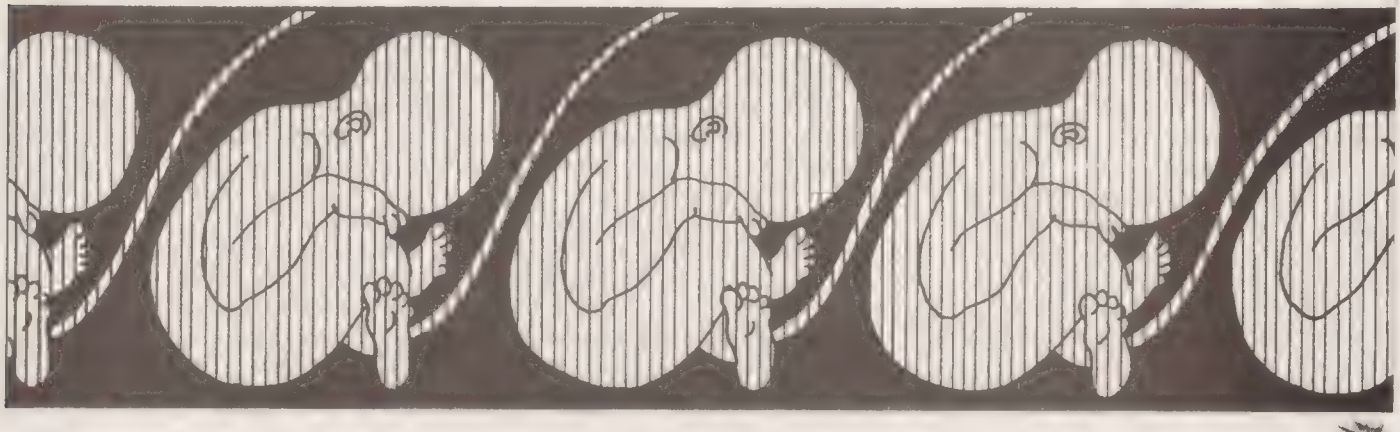

would name the next child, the one that be his if he succeeded. He reminded himself that it was none of his business.

He waited.

Whoever Iridium was, he or she was not around so Tomalin continued his approach toward the craft. The ship itself was hardly the idealized image of the brave Valkyries sturdy steed that he'd been raised on. Nor did it fit the shiny white vessel that 'The Decorated Valkryies' were always shown with in the official news videos. The paint was chipped and worn and the hull was marred by weapon's fire. There was a big dent on the door that twisted the proud sheild of the Matriarchy. It's olive tree stood at a cockeyed angle instead of straight and tall. The propulsion system of the two person fighter was spilled out onto the tarmac in a puddle of lubricant. Two legs in tall leather boots could be seen underneath.

Tomalin cleared his throat. He made a soft mumbling sound to try to prevent the cracking.

"Lady?" he said carefully. "Your son sent me here to find you." To his relief his voice didn't go through any gyrations although it was shockingly deep. He was suddenly afraid he might even become a baritone. He was hoping for at least a tenor so he could continue singing. Perhaps his voice hadn't finished settling yet.

A feminine hand appeared beside the feet. A woman's voice ordered, "Give me the black thing with the red buttons on it."

Tomalin scanned the mess and spotted a black thing with red buttons. He hesitated just a moment before grabbing it. As a whole male he wasn't supposed to be handling such objects. Was it more important to obey her order or observe the ban?

"Come on!" she repeated and the hand gestured impatiently.

Obedience was paramount. Tomalin picked up the black thing with the red buttons on it and put it in the expectant hand. He stood waiting, quiet and attentive as he'd been trained, until she should finish and address him again. He was shocked when he heard her release a long string of invective. It was unseemly behaviour for a Matriarch. He'd been warned that valkryies could be coarse and it wasn't his place to judge. Still, if such language was her norm it would take a great deal of getting used to.

Eventually she rolled herself out from under the craft and shocked him again. She was filthy with lubricant and dirt and even her face was smudged. That he might have expected, but it was her hair that left him open mouthed with astonishment. It was as short as a male's. He suddenly wished he was back home again. His mother regarded her flowing hair as the crowning mark of femininity and would never have allowed anyone, not even a male, to see her in such a state.

She was filthy with lubricant and dirt and even her face was smudged. That he might have expected, but it was her hair that left him open mouthed with astonishment. It was as short as a male's.

She was looking him over speculatively. He became aware of his gaping mouth and he closed it and dropped his eyes, watching as she wiped some grease from her palms with a rag hardly any cleaner than her filthy hands. He swallowed. Her fingernails were as short as her hair and black beneath what little there was of the white tip.

She shouted at the neuter who had greeted Tomalin. "Boron! We need a new coil."

"Can't afford it," Boron shouted back.

Tomalin hid his dismay again. That was not the way to speak to any Matriarch, much less one's own mother.

Boron got up from his computer console and crossed the tarmac to them. "I told you we're broke again."

"So get a loan," she answered.

"We ran our credit limit to the top getting this peter here, remember?" Boron made a dismissive wave in Tomalin's direction. "I told you to wait six months."

"And I told you," she replied, "that with Cadmium planning on getting her own place we need another baby to keep my mother's allowance from dropping. How else can I support all you males?"

She looked at Tomalin and smiled. "Still, girls are worse. They insist on growing up and becoming Matriarchs in their own right."

She glanced back at Boron before returning to her inspection of Tomalin. Her look made him feel a queer sort of warmth in his belly. "We'll just have to mortgage her baby."

"But she's at eight months already," Boron said. "She isn't going to be happy, after getting this far without it. She's already made a deposit on the new mother's co-op and she might loose her place."

Her tone abruptly changed to properly authoritarian. Her hands went to her hips and she stared at her son. "If she hadn't screwed up the last mission we wouldn't need a new coil, would we?"

Boron dropped his eyes to the ground. "No, Mother."

"Get the mortgage. If we're lucky I'll get decorated again and that will solve the problem. If not, a coil will only cost her the first four or five months of her payments."

Boron nodded unhappily. "Yes, Mother."

Her voice turned pleasant again. "She'll just have to put up with me a little longer. Besides, she'll need me for advice on nursing whether she wants to admit it or not. Sixteen year olds are impossible, right?"

She added the last while looking at Tomalin so he thought it would be all right to ask a question. "Doesn't the Matriarchy cover your ship's repairs, Lady?"

Boron snorted with utter contempt. "Why do you keep bringing in these stupid virgins? You know how much I hate them."

She chuckled tolerantly, still giving Tomalin that strange unsettling look. "Ignore Boron. He knows I have no say in who is assigned to me."

She tossed the greasy rag at her son and he ducked, laughing at her affectionately. "You see, I'm such a successful experienced breeder that they have me breaking in virgins now. You're my third. I guess that means I'm getting old."

Tomalin had absolutely no idea how to tactfully answer that.

She spared him. "Are you hungry?"

He answered her with the proper deference. "If it pleases your Ladyship, I am."

Boron laughed at him.

"My name is Tamar," she said sternly though she was smiling at him. She put her hands on her hips. "You will address me by my name and drop the ladyship crap. If you call me '*Lady*' again I shall slap your pretty face. Is that clear?"

"Yes La-," Tomalin began automatically but he broke off before he earned the slap. "Tamar," he repeated. In all of his life he had never addressed a woman by her name without a title in front.

"Follow me then," she said and strode

toward the house without looking back.

Tomalin picked up his two suitcases and half ran until he caught up to five paces behind his Lady. He matched his pace size to her so he would stay precisely there. It was the respectful behavior he'd been drilled in but he knew, without looking back, that Boron was sniggering at him.

Tamar led him up the sweeping front drive and into the gracious front hallway. She gestured at him to drop his suitcases there. He did and then went after her into the living area of the home. It was smaller than his mother's house, but adequate.

The kitchen uncle, balding and fat, greeted her affectionately and she kissed his cheek. "This is the new one, Uncle Joey." She glanced backwards "What's your name?"

"Tomalin." It was strange for him not to add the proper honorific.

Tamar picked up a sheaf of mail from a desk and began flipping through it. ""He's hungry. What have you got for him?"

"How about my famous spaghetti and meatballs?" Uncle Joey asked.

Tomalin hid his look of disgust. Eating meat was an example of masculine behaviour. His mother had raised him as a vegetarian.

"He looks well brought up so he's probably a vegetarian," Tamar said absently, frowning over the contents of an envelope. "Leave out the meatballs, Uncle." She turned to Tomalin, setting the mail aside. "Tomalin, this is my Uncle Joey. He takes care of the cooking and runs the household. Have something to eat while I shower and clean up."

Tomalin was unsure how much of the courtesies he was supposed to drop. Uncle was the highest rank a male could hold and was deserving of respect from a mere inseminator. Still she didn't want the formalities. He gave his head a quick bob at Uncle Joey. It was not quite the required bow, but it felt better than doing nothing at all. Tamar was walking away, down a long hallway, oblivious to his uncertainty.

"It'll take me a minute to get the meal ready," Uncle Joey said. "I suggest you look over The Gallery so you can see how lucky you are."

"Yes, Uncle," Tomalin replied.

Uncle Joey returned to the kitchen and Tomalin walked around the living room. As custom required, one wall was given to the baby pictures of each of Tamar's twelve children. Below each picture was the child's name and a small snapshot of the father with his name in smaller print below that and a number indicating birth order in the father's offspring line.

Children were expected to memorize and recite their father's name and their birth order number to help prevent accidental inbreeding. Tomalin's father was named Robert, Lynn's son (14). From the snap on his mother's wall, Tomalin knew he was blond with brown eyes and a square jaw. He looked at each picture in Tamar's Gallery in turn, paying close attention to the fathers.

Actinium, fathered by Boris son of Sara (27), Boron, fathered by Toby son of Mary (15), on the list went. Cadmium, Dysporium, Erbium, Francium, Gadolinium, Holimium, Indium, Krypton, Lanthium, Mendelevium, each with a different father. Tamar was mother to seven boys and five girls. Over the corner of two of the girl's pictures, Actinium and Dysporium, were draped black ribbons and red combat medals. Two of her five daughters had died in the defense of the Matriarchy.

Tomalin had only the vaguest idea of how he was supposed to father a child. The sexual act was never discussed within the Matriarchy so such pairings were the only way to learn.

Lanthium and Mendelvium were both designated as (1) on the father line as his child would be. The geneticists always made certain to have pairs that included at least one sexually experienced partner. Tomalin had only the vaguest idea of how he was supposed to father a child. The sexual act was never discussed within the Matriarchy so such pairings were the only way to learn. Artificial insemination was forbidden on penalty of death to prevent the overuse of specific males that had occurred in the early days of the Matriarchy.

"We're betting on Nobelium if it's a girl and Neodymium if it's a boy." Uncle Joey said.

To Tomalin's relief, the plate of pasta and sauce he carried was without meatballs. Uncle Joey also had a large tossed salad. He put the dishes on the adjacent dining room table and gestured for Tomalin to sit.

"Of course," Uncle Joey prattled on, "Boron is betting she'll choose Neon because she likes his short name best of all. She says she's quitting after palladium because there's no element that starts with a Q. I keep telling her she'll just have to make one up."

Tomalin sat.

"Eat, eat," Joey said. He stood, watching Tomalin. "I'm glad to see you have blue eyes and blond hair. She carries the fair traits as you can see from Krypton and Gadolinum's pictures. I'd like another blond with blue eyes in the house. I hope you don't carry any allergy genes. Mendy and Boron are both allergic to housedust, as if I didn't have enough work to do around here. You've got nice legs, though. Tamar's a leg woman, you know."

Tomalin didn't comment. Uncle Joey didn't notice and rambled on about the vices and virtues of the other fathers. Tomalin decided Joey didn't need any answers beyond the occasional grunt or nod and it was better not to talk about such things anyway. He began eating instead and found that Uncle Joey was a good cook.

With an one ear tuned to the old male, he tried to imagine a picture of a baby on the wall with his picture below. It wasn't easy. He knew he was more handsome than any of the other fathers had been. It was a vanity and he knew that, but a small one and relatively harmless among all the possible male vices. If this Tamar liked his legs, then so much the better.

A timer buzzed in the kitchen and Joey got up and lumbered away, still chattering.

"I suppose you're just twenty." Tamar had suddenly returned.

Startled, Tomalin leaped to his feet, almost spilling his food, and he bowed and stuttered, "Yes, La-, I mean Tamar."

"Oh stop that!" Tamar said impatiently. "I don't expect you to stand on ceremony with me. You'll be here at least ten months so you might as well start becoming accustomed to my house's ways. Sit down and eat."

She began rummaging through the desk drawer.

He stood, unsure what to do.

She stopped rummaging and looked at him. "I said, sit and finish your meal."

Tomalin reluctantly broke two more of the ettiquette rules for inseminators as he sat in her presence and ate while she didn't. A Lady's direct instruction overrode all other rules, he reminded himself. He discreetly looked her over as he finished his meal and she continued her search.

She was clean now and neatly dressed. She had on some sort of wig because her dark hair appeared long and free flowing

down her neck and back. She lacked a proper Matriarch's figure. No doubt the harsh military training had prevented her from developing it. Only her belly had any curve and even that was small. Her waist was still narrower than her hips and her breasts were small. He was glad she had a youthful figure. It made her seem more approachable.

Tamar found whatever she was looking for and tucked it into a pocket before looking back at him. Their eyes met and he quickly looked down. Eye contact was the beginning of aggressiveness.

"Stand up," she said.

Tomalin immediately rose facing her. She indicated with one finger that she wanted him to turn around. He did.

"Not bad at all," she commented, "you've got nice legs." She stepped closer to him"Show me the implant site."

He pulled up the sleeve of his right arm to the top. The wound from where they had cut the hormone suppressing implant out of his bicep had not yet healed completely. She took his arm and peered at the small pink scar.

"How long has it been out?" Tamar asked.

"Six weeks," Tomlain replied.

She swore at him. "I thought so. You don't even have a full beard yet. It'll probably be another three months before you sperm count is up enough. What is your empathy rating?"

"Seven," Tomalin answered proudly. The scale was out of ten.

To his surprise she swore at him again. "Why, why, why, do they do this to me?" She threw his arm away in disgust. "I mean the sentiment is nice and all that. But I keep telling them if I produce daughters with too high an empathy rating I can't make good Valkyries out of them. How can they kill if they keep empathising with the enemy?" She sighed resignedly. "Hopefully it'll be a boy and I won't have to deal with the problem."

Tamar stepped to a hallway closet and took out a long coat. "Now I have to go into town to pick up the new coil for the fighter. You'll take the small bed in my room. The blue dresser is yours while you're here and the closet next to that is for you as well." She started buttoning the coat. "Unpack and settle in. I'll introduce you to the rest of family formally at supper." She waved a stern finger at him. "Supper is always promptly at six or Uncle Joey gets upset. Stay out of the garage if you go exploring. There are radioactive substances in there and we have to keep your gonads safe now don't we?" With that she walked out leaving him staring uncertainly after her.

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"It's positive." Tamar said, looking at the little test tube.

Tomalin came up behind her to see for himself. The tube had definitely turned blue, indicating she was pregnant. She turned and kissed his mouth and he took her in his arms and pulled her close. Automatically his body surged and he wanted her again.

She laughed at him and touched his stubbled cheek.

"Shave first, lover," she said affectionately. Tamar rubbed herself suggestively against his body. "We don't have to keep doing this anymore."

"Do you want to stop?" he asked her, running a practiced hand over her swollen breast.

It had taken him eleven months to impregnate her. Tamar had made many jokes about her withering ovaries. It hadn't concerned either of them much. Being thirty-nine, it was expected that she wouldn't catch as easily. Besides she had been Decorated twice for destroying two enemy troop transport vessels. She had no financial problems for the time being so there was no rush. In those months, he had learned a lot more than he had ever dreamed. He was now as accomplished at pleasing her as she was him.

"Stop? Of course not, darling," Tamar replied. "It's while pregnant that sex is best, at least until after the mid-trimester. Now shoo, and give me a moment's privacy in the bathroom first. We have to be quick though. It is Erbium's homecoming day and we have a million things to do."

Tomalin shaved his face with the electric razor while he waited.

Erbium had turned thirteen two weeks before. As the law required, he had been sent to the geneticists to have his genome evaluated. The entire household had celebrated when the official word came back. Erbium was not required for breeding. He would be coming home today to a hero's welcome after recovering from his operation.

They didn't get in fights seeking a mate. They were less aggressive and more affectionate. It was healthier for them too. Neutered males lived longer lives free of many cancers and reproductive difficulties. They were free of libido drives and the awful insatiable hunger of waking in the morning aroused but alone.

Tomalin had come home too, though with his testicles and an implant to suppress their hormone production. He had been greeted with mourning. He continued to live with his mother until he was eighteen. Once a year, he went back to the geneticist's center for a fresh implant. At eighteen he had left his mother's house for good and spent two years undergoing the training required of an inseminator while the implants stayed in. He was given a general education suitable for a male. He had learned dance, comportment, dinner conversation, massage, all the thing required to make him interesting to a Matriarch.

He had also received extensive lectures from his teachers on the problems caused to society by unrestrained male sexuality. He had seen the films of the wars brought about by male violence, pestilence by male ignorance, and the environmental destruction caused by male greed that had evenutally forced the migration of Humans from their home world to this place of enlightenment. After seeing the old films of woman being tortured, pornography they called it, he had been completely and thoroughly drilled in the kind of behaviour required to always keep his violent and dangerous male tendencies in check.

Now, in the Matriarchy, males were free of all that. They made better men when neutered. They were content to stay at home and care for their mothers and sisters. They didn't get in fights seeking a mate. They were less aggressive and more affectionate. It was healthier for them too. Neutered males lived longer lives free of many cancers and reproductive difficulties. They were free of libido drives and the awful insatiable hunger of waking in the morning aroused but alone. Except for the inseminators, like himself.

Tamar came out of the bathroom and Tomalin eagerly took her in his arms. The pleasure of sex was his reward for the many sacrifices he had to make for the Matriarchy. No one had ever discussed that in the training lectures though they'd whispered about it among themselves at night. Secretly, he felt sorry for Erbium

who would never know the sweet ache of wanting a woman or the pleasure of having her. Erbium was only thirteen and had no idea of what he had just lost.

As for Tomalin, he had many more children to father before he had to give sex up. Besides, they said that once the hormones were gone the desire was too. He put aside the thought that as soon as the child was born he would be sent away from Tamar. He had forced that out of his mind as if it had never been there. He was so content here with her.

The only time Tomalin wasn't happy was when she was away in space battling the pirates and marauders that wanted to destroy the tranquillity of the Matriarchy or the spread of the Enlightenment. Each time Tamar left for space he couldn't sleep or eat properly. He suffered terrible nightmares because he feared for her safety.

That was when he knew for certain that the way of the Matriarchy was the right way. The neutering got rid of male cruelty and male warrior behavior. If only the rest of the galaxy would adopt their ways there would be peace. He didn't understand why so many planets refused the Right Way and fought the spread of the Matriarchy, often to the death. It made no sense at all.

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"You may enter," Lady Rosalena said.

"Yes, your Ladyship," Tomalin replied and he bowed deeply from the waist, carefully gauging her mood.

Unlike Tamar, this Matriarch demanded rigid obedience and the strictest adherence to protocol. One wrong move, and sometimes none at all, would earn him scratched arms or a slapped face. His latest injury was still visible as a yellow ring below his right eye. He watched her closely, ready to duck.

The Lady Rosalena had the full Matriarch's figure and weighed almost twice what he did. When she was angry, which was often, she was brutal. Beating an inseminator was a capital offense. However Tomalin had found out that if you complained they determined that the fault was yours for not keeping in your place. As the police woman told him in the hospital after Rosalena broke his arm, women were incapable of violence. Women were naturally peace-loving and nurturing. If they became violent, it was only because of the provocation of males.

Tomalin had been lashed across the buttocks ten times for disrespectful behaviour by the police that night. They had waited until after the doctor had finished setting his arm and applying the cast before administering their "correction." Their method hadn't left scars. You didn't scar an inseminator, especially one as pretty as he was. When they had returned him to her they also warned her to be more careful about injuring him enough to put him in hospital. That sort of excessiveness made for nasty and complicated paperwork that it was better not to have to deal with. She had heeded their advice.

That was when he knew for certain that the way of the Matriarchy was the right way. The neutering got rid of male cruelty and male warrior behavior.

"The test is positive," the Matriarch informed him. "I will no longer require your presence. I have told Uncle to move your things to the basement room until after the birth."

Tomalin hid his relief lest it offend her and cause her to attack him again. She was finally pregnant with Tomalin, son of Rebecca (4). The end of his most difficult assignment was in sight after five long and trying months. He would be glad to leave her. Though custom dictated that he be present at the birth, he had already been told she would find a way to get him out of the house sooner than that. There were women who would pay her handsomely for his services until the naming ceremony required he be moved again. Although it was a violation of the breeding contract to loan him out, the practice was widely tolerated. It was just as well for him if he never saw his fourth child.

After Nobelium had been born, he had held her and decided she was the most perfect baby in all the world. Her naming ceremony at one month's age meant he had to leave her. Tamar had thrown an enormous party and made a huge fuss before sending him on his way with a big kiss. In spite of her private tears, send him she did, against his every hope. Not that Tamar really had a choice. That was the Matriarchy's way.

Tomalin had contemplated snatching his daughter and fleeing to space with her. Every so often the news videos were filled with stories of an inseminator who had tried just that. The penalty was a slow and painful death for both father and child televised to the entire planet as a warning. He couldn't bear the thought of risking little Nobelium. Nor could he hurt Tamar that way.

Besides, he had no idea how to pilot a spacecraft. Males weren't permitted knowledge that made it easy for them to run. He left Tamar and sweet, sweet, Nobelium and managed to keep from weeping until outside of their home and into the taxi shuttle that was waiting to take him to his new assignment. He wept for weeks afterward whenever he was alone.

They said it got easier each time you were moved but it wasn't true. It hadn't been any easier to leave Rachel and little Robert, or Michah and baby Penna. This time, he'd be spared that particular agony though the beatings were not a fair trade. They hurt him far less.

"Get out," the Lady Rosalena snapped.

Tomalin bowed and did, being careful not to turn his back on her.

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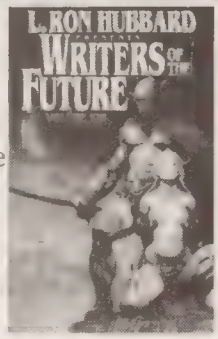

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Factoring Sawyer

Humanity and its foibles play a large part in the Canadian author's works

By
STEVE LUIMES

Pick up one of Robert Sawyer's novels and you'll find that there are no dauntless starship pilots or tough-as-nails space marines battling to save the human race from terrifying aliens. There are no princes-in-rags destined to rule the galaxy, or cyberspace cowboys taking on ruthless multinational corporations.

Most of Sawyer's characters are ordinary people. Even his scientists have problems that most of us can identify with: marital difficulties, family strife, ever-growing piles of bills, ugly rumors at the water cooler.

His characters are "the little guy," says Sawyer, because "the little guy is all any Canadian can aspire to be on the world stage. Bill Clinton goes to bed at night saying, 'I am the most powerful man in the world.' Jean Chretien goes to bed at night saying, 'I know the most powerful man in the world,' but that's the best he can do."

And if being Canadian means being "the little guy," then Sawyer's characters are anything if not distinctly Canadian: real people with real problems, approaching 40, plagued by self-doubt, worried about their careers and getting a little soft around the middle.

Of course, this is science fiction, so these ordinary people are caught in extraordinary circumstances: a medical technician discovers the human soul; first contact results in a grisly and bizarre celebrity murder.

Sawyer's ordinary people are overwhelmed by earth-shattering events: one single new discovery by an all-too-human scientist, and the fundamental concepts that most of us take for granted — life, death, individuality, our place in the cosmos — are changed forever.

Sawyer, Canada's only native-born full-time science fiction author, presents this future because he sees good science fiction as a watchdog, born to issue a public warning about the social impact of science.

"The purpose of science fiction is to be the conscience of the technological age. We do what the scientists themselves are either afraid to do or constrained from doing — try to see beyond the next quarterly review with the granting agency, and instead look 10, 20 or a 100 years down the road.

"Not the tame spokespeople for the scientific community but its most vocal critics, science fiction writers should look beyond science's polished theme-park-future and imagine the social impact of a great leap forward in (for example) robotics or computing: 'Who's going to lose their job because of this? Who's going to have less dignity, or less privacy, or less reason to live because of this? Our job is to be, as William Gibson said, 'profoundly ambivalent' about technological change, because no one else fills that niche in the social system."

To Sawyer, science fiction isn't mere escapism, but deadly serious social commentary.

Sawyer

The purpose of science fiction is to be the conscience of the technological age.

first started imagining his own future when he was "maybe 10 years old," and reading Trouble on Titan by Alan E. Nourse.

In the introduction, Nourse wrote about how much fun it was to write science fiction: after a little research, you could generate in your head entire, populated worlds and even get paid for it.

"He was saying 'Hey, you can do this, too!'," Sawyer explained.

As a university student, Sawyer's first short story, The Contest, was published in Ryerson's Whitewall Review and later in Isaac Asimov's anthology 100 Great Short Short Stories. Since then, he has won 19 awards internationally for his work, including the Nebula for The Terminal Experiment.

As it happens, winning the Nebula turned Sawyer from a mid-list author to a bankable name.

"My career was not in great shape before I won the Nebula," he recalls.

His book, Golden Fleece, had at first done poorly (though Tor Books has recently bought the rights to re-issue it), and his other novels — Far Seer, Fossil Hunter, Foreigner and End of an Era — hadn't yet put him on the map.

With his long-term future in question, Sawyer sat down to write an award-winning novel that would not only impress a reading audience but his peers in the Science Fiction Writer's Association as well. Sawyer's agent passed around The Terminal Experiment, but couldn't find a buyer. Though all who read it liked it, they argued it was a radical departure from his previous work. It was finally taken by Harper-Collins' Prism line, which at the time had not yet published a single book and was looking to hire on veteran authors. The book gathered a following and was nominated for a Nebula Award in the Best Novel Category.

At the awards ceremony in Los Angeles, Sawyer recalls, "My stomach was in knots. I thought I didn't have a prayer."

Of the five books nominated, three were from Tor, which had mailed out copies of its nominees' novels to all of the SFWA's voting members. When Sawyer won, he was "stunned and completely delighted. My career changed overnight."

Immediately, British and U.S. advances from publishers doubled, advances from Japan went up 500 per cent. European publishers from the Netherlands to Bulgaria took on The Terminal Experiment.

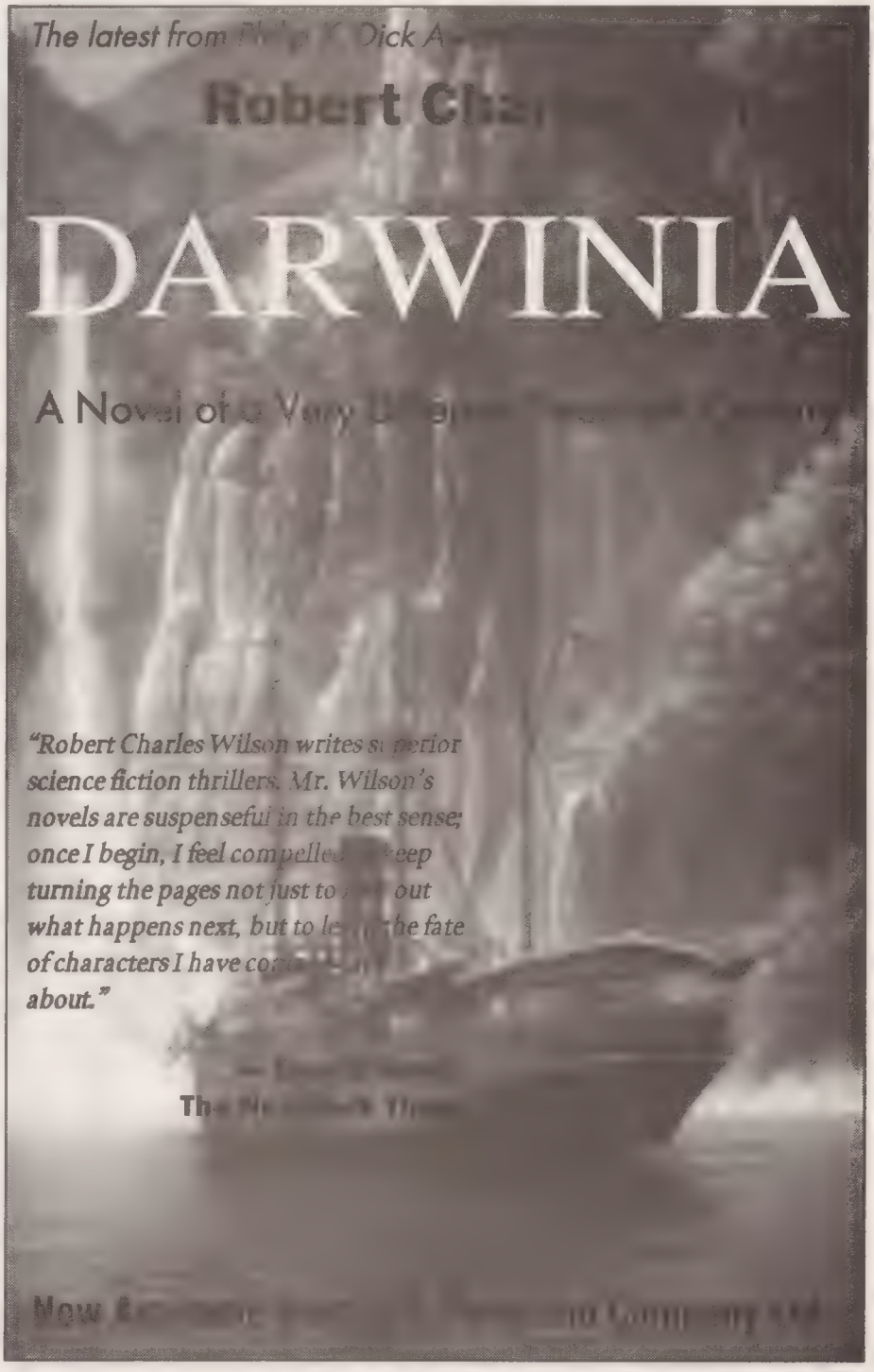
In Europe and Asia, readers gravitated not only to Sawyer's own reputation, but to Canada's as a country producing talented writers. Like other creators of Canadian science fiction, he believes that there isn't always a need for a happy ending, and that there is room for a discussion of important social issues, however controversial. Though he gets nothing but positive feedback from his American readers, some of them have advised him to shy away from subjects like America's judicial system or socialized medicine, because (they told him), "some Americans aren't going to like that."

But if there are any who have actually objected, they haven't contacted him yet. Despite what some Canadians might think, says Sawyer, "Americans aren't stupid. That's how they got to be Americans."

Sawyer's latest book is Factoring Humanity.

Sawyer chose the title because it suggested both techy science fiction ideas and human relationships.

"The story alternates between a marriage in crisis because a daughter has accused her father of childhood abuse and an attempt to decipher alien radio messages and bring an artificial intelligence



into being."

Like his previous works, Factoring Humanity deals with the impact of technology on our personal lives; again, similar to his past novels, this one approaches the subject from its own new perspective.

In Factoring Humanity, Kyle Davis, a U of T computer scientist, is working on the world's first functioning artificial intelligence; his estranged wife, Heather, is deciphering radio messages sent from Alpha Centauri.

Their daughter Becky, on the advice of her therapist, accuses Kyle of sexually abusing her when she was a child, and Kyle's career and his chances of reuniting with his wife are gravely jeopardized. Heather takes it upon herself to find out whether it's her husband or her daughter who has an accurate memory of the past.

The personal and scientific aspects of the book intertwine: tormented by fears that his scientific career and already-troubled marriage will be destroyed by the accusation, Kyle bares his soul to his prototype AI, Cheetah.

From the foothold of this family crisis, Sawyer expands to explore questions worthy of hard SF — how subjective is memory? Are we alone in the universe? Is artificial intelligence possible? Is it wise? — from the perspectives of true-to-life and flawed human beings. Sawyer was inspired to write the family conflict into the book while preparing material for the Children's Aid Society for a friend who'd been falsely accused of sexual abuse.

As he discovered, mere accusation of abuse can ruin a person's reputation. He also wanted to explore psychological themes — he'd written about Freudian psychology in Foreigner — like the collective unconscious and memory. One of Factoring Humanity's hard sf-subjects has become one of his personal causes and led him to introduce a "cautionary tale" element to the book.

He wonders whether the race to create machine life is the race to build humanity's replacement: "It worries me that we're rushing blindly ahead to create our species' successor, something that has never been done till now."

Part human drama, part scientific exploration, Factoring Humanity — like Sawyer's other novels and short stories — is about the sometimes drastic consequences of change, and the need for time to pause and reflect about what humanity can do and what it ought to do.

To the ends of the Earth

Kevin J, Anderson has taken readers to the farthest reaches of the universe, for El Pedrito! he had to do a little travelling of his own

While conducting research for his latest novel, El Pedrito! — the novelization of a L. Ron Hubbard screenplay, Kevin J. Anderson got to ride the Amazon in a dugout canoe. He sank right after this picture was taken.

After more than 20 novels to his credit, author Kevin J. Anderson is tying together the threads left by two of science fiction's greatest writers — L. Ron Hubbard and Frank Herbert.

Albeit in two distinctly different ways.

In the case of Hubbard's El Pedrito!, Anderson was given the task of adapting Hubbard's unpublished screenplay into novel form.

El Pedrito, which reaches bookstores next month, is a romantic adventure based on an actual event that occurred to Hubbard while he was working as a geologist in the Bahamas and Latin America. In the novel, a naval officer Tom Smith discovers that he is a deadringer for a South American spy and revolutionary, Pedrito Miraflores.

Unfortunately, there are many people who would like nothing better than to see Miraflores dead. And while Smith is dodging assassins and spies, Miraflores has gone north to the United States and has assumed Smith's identity. Untangling the mess, simply draws Smith deeper into Miraflores' world.

It was a daunting task since much of the comedy contained in the script, while funny on the screen, would have fallen flat on the printed page.

"A lot of it was not funny when you read it in print, it was very visual comedy," Anderson explains. "It's like all comedies on the screen. I could be fall-down funny when you see it on the screen, but it doesn't come across when it's in a novel."

Working on the book also required Anderson to travel to Ecuador to an Inca temple and to the headwaters of the Amazon — where he plunked himself into a dugout canoe for a photo opportunity and promptly fell into the river.

Adding to the challenge for Anderson was the fact that the genre was new ground for him. But Anderson said this challenge was a small one.

"I've stepped over genres whether it's combining elements of horror with science fiction," he said. "But I con-

sider myself a story teller and I'll write a story that interests me."

Anderson points out that challenge is what keeps him from being bored as a writer.

"There are some other writers who sit back , yawn and crank out the same book over and over again. If I did that, I'd get bored pretty quickly," he said.

Anderson has had a long association with the publishing arm of the L. Ron Hubbard empire.

During his youth, he was a quarterly entrant in the L. Ron Hubbard ...for new writers. He never won.

"I desperately wanted to go to that workshop (winners are able to attend workshops held by established science fiction and fantasy writers as part of the competition). It sounded better than any writing course I could attend. Now, I get to judge and I get to hear what they're saying."

With the publication of his first novel in 1986, Anderson became ineligible for the competition. But his track record as a novelist did land him a place as a judge for the quarterly contest. Fellow judges Dave Wolverton and Frederick Pohl have been hired to novelize two other Hubbard screenplays.

Since completing work on El Pedrito! Anderson has taken on another daunting task.

Recently, Anderson and Herbert's son,Brian, completed work on a draft that will become the first part of a trilogy that will become a prequel to Herbert's renowned Dune.

The two poured over the elder Herbert's detailed notes and plans for the Dune universe.

The result is 68 chapters of a trilogy that establishes the reasons for all the incidents contained in Herbert's masterpiece.

Anderson added that he would like to see the pre-history of The Dune novel and the myriad characters explored even more than it will be in the trilogy.

"When it comes to Dune," you have to be ambitious," Anderson says."

And working on the project, is a dream come true for the Colorado-based author.

"Dune is my favorite science fiction novel of all time, so to be playing in the sandbox, there's even more pressure that I don't disappoint everybody and do my best work," he said.

The first of the Dune prequels will likely be available in Fall 1999.

☆

— Chris Krejlgaard

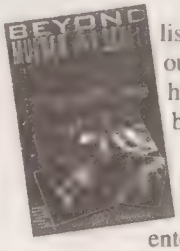
Godzilla at World's End: a sinfully good book

C'mon, admit it. You want to read Godzilla at World's End (Random House). Just like you want to read all the other Godzilla novels Random House is publishing to celebrate the return of the King of All Monsters.

Go ahead. Enjoy. It's a fun read and you'll get a bang out of the Big Guy's latest romp-and-stomps as well as the guest appearances of the other mega stars like Hedorah the Smog Monster, Rodan and Mothra.

— Gregg Chamberlain

☆ ☆ ☆



Andy Mangels has established a reputation for thoroughness when it comes to his behind-the-scenes books.

In the past, he has illuminated the work of artist George Perez, written entertaining comic books and has explained in minuté the weaponry of the Star Wars universe.

His latest effort, Beyond Mulder and Scully (Carol Publishing Group), follows that same sense of thoroughness and zest for his subject matter. He is clearly enthralled by the subject matter and the reader cannot help but share that seem awe. The book is a series of interviews and listings of the various secondary actors and guests that have become part of X-Files lore since the series became a reality.

The interviews are illuminating and allow the reader to better appreciate the people who are too often forgotten when the series' praises are sung. The go deeper than the interviews mainstream entertainment media are content to publish when it interviews the X-Files' principal players.

— Chris Krejlgaard

☆ ☆ ☆

Next to the dragons, one of the most beloved characters in Anne McCaffrey's Pern series is Robinton, the MasterHarper of Pern (Del Rey), who loves his world and all its wonders so much.

So it's only proper and right that when McCaffrey decided to write her latest Pern book, the subject should be the life and times of Robinton up to the moment when the whole series began in Analog with the novelette, "Weyr Search."

This is McCaffrey at her best. The book answers many of the questions that Pern fans have had about Robinton's early life, including the trials and tragedies which set him on the path to becoming the MasterHarper.

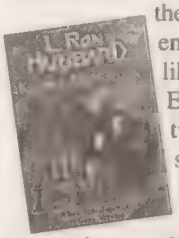
— Gregg Chamberlain

Editor's note: for more on the venerable Anne McCaffrey, see the next issue of Parsec.

☆ ☆ ☆

El Pedrito! (Bridge Publications Inc.) isn't the type of novel that we've come to expect from L. Ron Hubbard.

Before his death, Hubbard was one of the standard-bearers of science fiction during what I like to call its Golden Age. El Pedrito! is more romantic comedy than fantasy or science fiction — despite the fact that Kevin J. Anderson was the one who transformed the unproduced screenplay into novel form (see accompanying story).



The novel serves as a testament to the range of both Hubbard and of Anderson, who does a stellar job in bringing the story to novel form. And he whets our appetites to see what else the Hubbard estate has in store for readers when the other two recently found screenplays are released in novel form.

— Chris Krejlgaard

Recommended reading

☆ David Brin, Heaven's Reach; Bantam Spectra (HC)

☆ Michael A. Stackpole; Bantam Spectra (HC);

☆ Paul J. McAuley; Child of the River; Avon Eos (HC);

☆ Terry Brooks; Running With the Demon, DelRey (PB);

☆ John Cramer; Einstein's Bridge; Avon Eos (PB).

Strong women mark of Anime master

By
EMRU TOWNSEND

Since I started writing this column, I've devoted a considerable amount of ink to anime, or Japanese animation—about every other review has covered a Japanese title.

During that time, I've always wanted to cover the films of Studio Ghibli, in particular those of Hayao Miyazaki, who I consider to be the most accomplished feature director alive.

However, I never reviewed any of his films because there were only two available in North America: Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind, which was horrendously edited and redubbed as Warriors of the Wind, and My Neighbor Totoro, which got better treatment but whose link to science fiction is tenuous at best.

In the summer of 1996, I read the most startling news: Disney, almost the antithesis of Ghibli entered into an agreement with Japanese media company Tokuma Shoten to distribute, among other things, five of Hayao Miyazaki's classic films, and his most recent release, now barely a year old.

After holding my breath for two years, I can now confirm that Disney is going full steam ahead, and I now have an excuse to tell you why I'm a Miyazaki fan and why you should be, too.

Since I can't fit all of my reasons into one column, I'll split them across two issues; the one following will have my review of Disney's first Miyazaki release, Kiki's Delivery Service.

Reason #1: Strong female characters: We're approaching a new millennium. We've come a long way in terms of social development. So why are animated women still so . . . girly? Despite the post-Little Mermaid press about "strong animated women," most animated productions still reinforce some dated attitudes about gender.

Many heroines, no matter how self-sufficient, still go weak in the knees around the main man, and they usually still need rescuing. Other "strong" animated women are either oversexed or uninterested in men, or are decidedly masculine in appearance or demeanor.

In short, female strength is either balanced by excessive "femaleness" or reinforced with excessive "maleness".

Miyazaki's approach to animated women has consistently been remarkably progressive, and handled with a fairly subtle touch.

Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind's title character appears to be a classic warrior woman, a toughened 16-year-old princess suddenly thrust into the position of leader of her people. Nausicaä is, without a doubt, an action-packed tale, and she is its center. And yet, she spends remarkably little of the movie's two hours raising weaponry. Without resorting to saccharine dialogue or sappy histrionics, it's obvious that Nausicaä's strength is in her feminine traits.

More than anything else, she is a mother to all: a loving mother to her friends, a stern mother to her allies and a tough love mom to her opponents. And, like the best mothers, she will brave anything for her children.

It's also interesting to note that none of Miyazaki's movies contain traditional love stories. In all of his movies, there is a male character who may eventually become the object of the heroine's affections. But it's hinted at only lightly. No smoochies here, folks.

Reason #2: Science fiction without giant robots and ray guns: Many of Miyazaki's films qualify as SF (some, like Totoro, only barely), but they avoid overused conventions. Laputa: Castle in the Sky is about the search for the flying city from Swift's Gulliver's Travels, and the four people who have different reasons for finding it.

Although it's filled with fantastic flying machines and a technologically advanced flying city, Laputa looks nothing like your average mecha slugfest. Similarly, Nausicaä, a post-apocalyptic story with giant mutated insects, a foul miasma permeating the air, and more fantastic flying machines, owes more to Dune and French comic artist Moebius than, say, Road Warrior or Waterworld.

In the next Animated Discussion, I'll talk about how Miyazaki's approach to filmmaking allows him to get his thought-provoking messages across to the audience, and how he puts his personal stamp on in just about every frame of his work.

❑ Emru Townsend can be reached at emru@cam.org.

Babylon 5 CCG stays out of usual traps

By
JUSTIN MOHAREB

I first discovered Babylon 5 a few years ago, while flipping through channels not doing my schoolwork. My first episode was "The Geometry of Shadows," a very strong arc episode that gave me a great intro to the show.

One of the things that struck me about the show, as I learned more about it, was the incredible depth of the world, and the vast amount of . . . STUFF going on. Everything about it just awed me.

Being a good gamer, I naturally thought "What a great mileu! I wonder if they'll ever do a game based on it?"

Well, I did have to wait a bit, but I wasn't left hanging for too long.

The greatest barrier to the gaming development of the Babylon 5 universe was B5's creator, JMS (I'm not gonna try and spell it out). He tended to have high demands on the games, moulding them to his personal vision.

For those of you not familiar with the B5 universe, I suggest a) check out the Lurker's Guide to Babylon 5 on the Internet, b) picking up one of the Del Rey season summary books, c) finding a friend who has them on tape, and borrowing them, or d) watching the show in reruns on your local channel.

There's no way I could give it justice in a single column.

The game that best captures the flavor of the B5 universe is, oddly enough, the CCG.

Produced by Precedence Publishing (previously known for Immortal, a role-playing game) I couldn't get too close to for fear of being smothered by jargon), it allows four players (although it can be played by two or three, it works best with four) to take on the roles of the four factions (Human, Narn, Minbari and Centauri).

The goal of the game is to gain 20 power for your faction. The game allows each player to choose their starting hand, which is three cards plus the race's ambassador.

The game is fun to play, capturing the spirit of the show.

Influence can be "bought" up to a certain level, but once past it, you have to get it the hard way; earn it (or steal it from other people).

Influence is earned via the playing of conflicts. The conflicts are supported by characters, who will use one of their four abilities (Diplomacy, Intrigue, Psionics and Leadership. It's rare for any character to have more than one or two abilities). Deal making and back stabbing abound, as players connive to lead their races to glory.

B5:CCG earns big points for not falling for the same trap that the Star Wars & Star Trek card games did. In Babylon 5's CCG, you get all the basic characters from the show in the starter deck. While some characters are rares, they are more secondary characters with valuable abilities, not the main cast of the show.

There is some role-playing element to the game, but for the most part it consists of the Centauri players trying to show off their (usually horrendous) Londo accents. Ich.

The game also has Babylon 5, the Vorlons and the Shadows as non-player factions. A player can throw his faction's hat into the ring with any of the three, using their influence and power to help him on occasion.

The sole complaint I've heard with the B5 CCG is that only one player can play each Faction/race. It can be a pain in the bum, but regardless, B5 is still a great CCG.

The Babylon Project, which is the actual RPG produced in the B5 world suffers from a few flaws. The largest one is a problem of scale. The game can be set anywhere in the (huge) Babylon 5 universe (although the game itself is set before B5 is constructed). So, naturally, the authors had to make judgement calls on what got put into the main game.

I think the game suffered for it. The main game book is only 196 pages.

The main alien races get a few pages to describe them, while the non-aligned aliens (which are some of my favourite; Go Markab!Rah, Rah, Pahk-Ma-Ra!) get a paragraph each. The first supplement to The Babylon Project is the Earthforce Sourcebook.

It fills in the holes of the game system, giving rules for things such as autofire and space combat. It gives us an in depth look at the workings of Earthforce and the Earth Alliance in the years after the Earth Minbari war. It also gives us a look at some of the characters from the show at that time.

The Babylon Project books are wonderfully laid out, with a metallic margins. They do suffer from the lack of a decent index (or, for that matter, an indecent one), which is a great flaw in any gamebook these days.

The art tends to be rather lacklustre, as well; some of the shots seem to be taken straight from the show's computer graphics, while others are poor sketches.

Once TBP has a few sourcebooks to fill in the gaps in the universe, it'll allow a greater range of players to enjoy it. For now, only Gms with a great familiarity with the B5 universe will be able to make the universe sing as well as it should.

I'm most taken with the B5:CCG. It gives a good feel for the universe, without suffering from TBP's need to be set away from the action of the show.

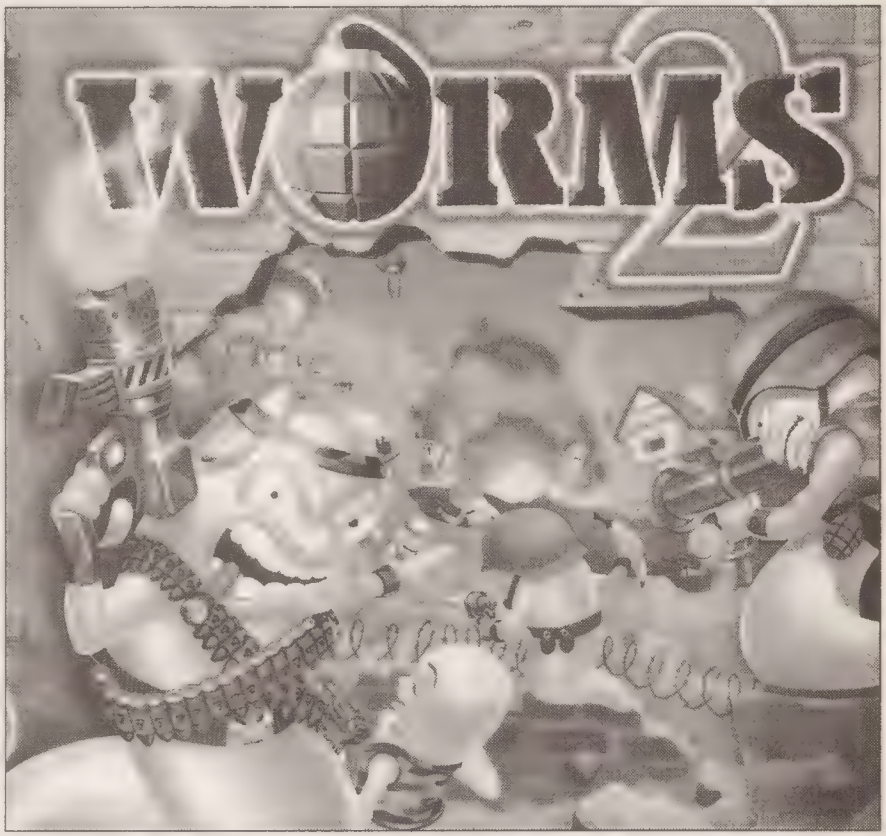
TBP is an interesting game that lacks the sense of involvement with the events of the show. B5 Wars is a wargame, but the miniatures are simply gorgeous, and I suggest you pick up your favorite race's ships ASAP.

Be seeing you.

❑ Justin Mohareb knows who he is, what he wants, why he's here, and where he's going.

Worms 2: Guts, glory and guffaws

By
GREG VAILLANCOURT



Worms 2 by Microprose is a strange game.

It's a lot like the Saturday morning cartoons with the coyote and the roadrunner. Worms go about trying to destroy each other with a myriad of weapons. The last worm(s) standing, and the team they represent, is the winner. Once you've won, you're presented with a glorious slow motion replay of the "winning kill." If you've lost, then you have to live through an agonizing replay of the final blow.

Now, normally, I'm not very fond of any games where there is either excessive or gratuitous violence. This game would have to be the former, but where most games portray violence senselessly and in lots of gory detail, this game does it in a twisted and humorous way.

After loading the game and seeing the Microprose name fly across the screen with myriad animations of worms loading bigger and even bigger weapons of war, you are presented with something special. What you get is a cartoon-type full-motion video of a worm or worms doing something (ping pong, slot machines, baseball, etc.) that will eventually end with the destruction of one or both worms.

Any fan of Spy vs. Spy will find these very comical and a special treat (as they load randomly every time before beginning the actual game) to get you in the mood for fun and mayhem.

The game involves teams of worms on a two dimensional background with many hills, valleys and unusual features going at in all out worm warfare. Each team has a given set of weapons to choose from (ie. Uzi, grenade, mortar, bazooka, etc.) and the object is to cause as much damage and death to the other team as possible until the only worms left wiggling are yours and you are the Victor Worm.

Along the way to your ultimate glory are certain things you have to keep in mind, like the effect of the wind and its speed on the trajectory and distance of your weapons. Also, if you happen to cause enough damage to a worm and he falls in the water, then that means instant death due to drowning. If, on the other hand, a worm falls from a great height to the ground, then the result is damage but not instant death. For those worms that are getting beaten up or are running short of weapons, there are airdrops of first aid kits or weapons crates respectively. To activate them just have your worm touch the object. Keep in mind that first aid kits always heal but weapons crates can sometimes backfire, so instead of gaining a weapon you can be the recipient of one.

For those older or more experienced gamers out there, this will probably remind you of the classic game, Artillery, where two tanks go at it on randomly generated terrain firing shots using power and angle as the means to an end of destroying the enemy tank.

The first to get enough hits on the enemy's tank wins.

Those people who are into multi-player madness can try hotseat, local area network or Internet play. Those without can try the single player mission game if you want something with a purpose.

If for any reason you get bored with the background, weapons, sounds or worms' speech, you can edit pretty much anything with the built in editor feature which really enhances the replay value of the game.

What made Artillery appealing was its simplicity. It was hard to master, but very easy to learn. Worms 2 is the same way, just a little more complex. I think, though, that most people will find the game is fun, addictive and easy to get into.

Worms 2 will make a great addition to any gamer who just needs to vent or kill time and solitaire just won't cut it.

☆ Worms 2 requires: IBM-PC 75MHz Pentium Compatible or faster processor, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, Double Speed CD-ROM Drive, Super VGA graphics for 640 x 480 x 256 (must be compatible with DirectX 5.0), Hard Drive (50MB Free), Mouse, DirectX Compatible Sound Card.

☆ Required for Multiplay: IPX or TCP/IP Local Area Network, ISP Connection (28.8bps connection or better recommended for Internet play).

❑ Greg Vaillancourt's software review appears in each issue of Parsec.

July/August
Program Schedule

Eastern Time	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	Pacific Time
6:00am	War of the Worlds					Space Exp. Mys. Forces	Canadian Documen.	3:00am
6:30am.								3:30am.
7:00am.	Prisoners of Gravity					Prisoners of Gravity		4:00 am
7:30am.	Dr. Who					Science Show		4:30am.
8:00am.	Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea					Conan	Dr. Who	5:00am.
8:30am.							Elect. Plyg	5:30am.
9:00am.	Lost in Space					Space Precinct	Time Tunnel	6:00am.
9:30am								6:30am
10am	Star Trek					Star Trek	Animation Action	7:00am
10:30am								7:30am
11:00am	War of the Worlds					Space Above And Beyond		8:00am
11:30am								8:30a.m
Noon	**Animation Action**					Alien Nation	Star Trek	9:00am
12:30pm								9:30am
1:00pm	Alfred Hitchcock Presents (From July 27)					Green Hornet	Twilight Zone	10:00am
1:30pm	Dr. Who					Serials		10:30am
2:00pm	Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea					Movie	Movie	11:00am
2:30pm								11:30am
3:00pm	Beauty and the Beast							noon
3:30pm								12:30pm
4:00pm	Star Trek					Conan	Space Specials	1:00pm
4:30pm								1:30pm
5:00pm	Weird Science					Alien Nation	Space Specials	2:00pm
5:30pm	Batman							2:30am
6:00pm	War of the Worlds					Space Above and Beyond	Space Island One	3:00pm
6:30pm								3:30pm
7:00pm	Alfred Hitchcock Presents (From July 27)					Nowhere Man	Twilight Zone	4:00pm
7:30pm	Weird Science						Animal X	4:30pm
8:00pm	Sliders		Space Island One	Sliders		Twilight Zone	Movie	5:00pm
8:30pm						Men in Black		5:30pm
9:00pm	Dark Skies	Space Above And Beyond	Conan	Nowhere Man	Movie	Movie		6:00pm
9:30pm								6:30pm
10:00pm	Deep Space Nine						Deep Space Nine	7:00pm
10:30pm								7:30pm
11:00pm	X-Files					Movie	Movie	8:00pm
11:30pm								8:30pm
midnight	Movie	Movie	Movie	Movie	Movie			9:00pm
12:30am								9:30pm
1:00am						Conan	Dark Skies	10:00pm
1:30am								10:30pm
2:00am	X-Files					Space Precinct	Time Tunnel	11:00pm
2:30am								11:30pm
3:00am	Twilight Zone					Space Above and Beyond	Animal X	midnight
3:30am	Dr. Who						Dr. Who	12:30am
4:00am	Deep Space				Men in Black	Nowhere Man	Deep Space Nine	1:00am
4:30am					Life/death Mysteries			1:30am
5:00am	X-Files					Star	Star	2:00am

Note: Schedule subject to change

Highlights

New fans can sniff through all forty-eight episodes of the first two seasons, four times a week - Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, starting July 6 at 8:00 p.m.

Weird Science premieres on July 6, and airs Monday — Friday at 12:30 p.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Animal X, a series that explores the real mystery stories of weird, wonderful unexplained animal phenomena. The series has its North American premiere July 5 at 7:30 p.m.

Alfred Hitchcock Presents, completes Space's new summer line-up, beginning July 27, and airs Monday — Friday at 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p. m.

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Conventions

July 10-12

Toronto Trek 12: Toronto, Ont., Regal Constellation. Scheduled guests: Richard Hatch, Robert Beltran, Jeff Conaway. Registration: before June 1, $40. Information: Suite 0116, Box 167, 65 Front St. W., Toronto, Ont. M5J 1E6, email: tcon@icomm.ca: website: www.icomm.ca/tcon

UFO Conference: St. Paul, Alta. Scheduled guests: Stanton Friedman (Nuclear Physicist), John Timmerman (J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies, USA), Chris Rutkowski (Ufology Research of Manitoba). Registration: July 10 $8.00, July 11 $15, both days $20. Information: St. Paul Chamber of Commerce at 1-888-SEE-UFOS (1-888-733-8367) or (403) 645-6800

July 17-19

Con-Version XV: Calgary, Alta. The Coast Plaza Hotel. Scheduled guests: J. Michael Straczynski, Joe Haldeman, Dave Duncan, Bridget Landry, J. Brian Clarke, Phil Currie: Registration: $35 to April 30; $40 to July 1. Information: #4, 203 Lynnview Road, SE, Calgary, Alta., T2C 2C6, email: toblan-br@cadvision.com

Anime North: Toronto, Ont, Michener Institute. Scheduled guests: Barb Schofield, Christina Carr, Martin Hunger. Registration: $20 between February 28th and June 30; $25 after June 30 and at the door; $15 for Saturday-only membership (only available at the door). Information: P.O. Box 24090, Dufferin Mall Postal Outlet, 900 Dufferin St., Toronto, Ont.

Sept. 25-27

inCONsequential: Fredericton, N.B. Hotel: Lord Beaverbrook Hotel; Scheduled Guests: David Feintuch, Christian J. Ready; Registration: $25 until Dec. 31, $30 until June 30, $35 at the door. Information: 403-527 Beaverbrook Court, Fredericton, N.B., E3B 1X6

Oct. 2-4

Concept 98: Montreal, Quebec. Downtown Days Inn; Scheduled guests: Robert J. Sawyer, Forest J. Ackerman, Gabriel Morissette; Registration: $20 until March 31. Information: P.O. Box 405, Station H, Montreal, PQ, H3G 2L1.

Nov. 6-8

Primedia: Toronto, Ont. Radisson East Don Valley. Scheduled guest: Walter Koenig; Registration: $25 until March 15, $30 until Sept. 30, $40 at the door. Information: 1403-33 King St., Weston, Ont., M9N 3R7, (905) 820-3844 or http://www.interlog.com/~kcozens/primedia/

Parsec assumes no responsibility for changes in hotels, guests, prices or dates. It is the sole responsibility of organizers to inform the editors of any changes prior to publication. ***These listings are free to non-profit oranizations. To be included simply send, fax or email the information to: Parsec, c/o Plaza 69 Post Office, 1935 Paris St., P.O. Box 21019, Sudbury, Ont., P3E 6G6.***

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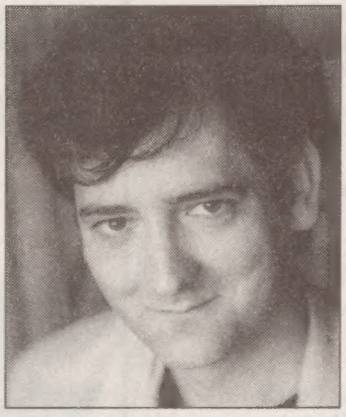
Who's Who

Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk. has been a professional illustrator and graphic designer for 18 years. Her artwork has appeared in magazines, newspapers and calendars across North America. She was the recipient of the Canadian Aurora Award for artistic achievement in 1991 and in 1993. She was Art Director for three years of ON SPEC magazine. Her artwork has appeared in THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S FANTASY MAGAZINE, DRAGON and DUNGEON magazines, PULPHOUSE THE HARDBACK MAGAZINE, PULPHOUSE FICTION MAGAZINE, SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, FANTASY TALES, and ON SPEC magazine. Lynne has served as Art Director for a printing firm and two (U.S.) national magazines, and was co-owner of NORTHWEST FINE ART PRESS (a company specializing in printing artwork for Seattle-area artists) for five years. Her artwork will appear this fall on the cover of What If . . . by Monica Hughes from McClelland & Stewart books. .



de Kruyff

Nicholas de Kruyff's story, Burger's Head, will appear in THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION. Other stories by Nicholas have appeared in ON SPEC. He is a writer and actor who lives in Toronto.

An active enthusiast of the sport of kickboxing, **Janine Cross** divides her time between practising martial arts and vicariously experiencing time travel through the characters in her stories. She is the current president of the North Shore Writers' Association and lives in a little yellow house in Vancouver with her wonderful husband, two dogs and two guinea pigs.

Cross

A resident of Winnipeg, **Natalie K. Bjorklund** is pursuing her masters degree in genetics. While she is a published scientist in the field of embryology, Valkyries represents the publication of her first speculative fiction work.

Stuart Immonen of Toronto is an accomplished artist whose work has appeared in DC Comics' Superman titles.

Bjorklund

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